Doctor of Education in Special Education
Dissertations

Department of Inclusive Education

Spring 5-7-2019

Voices from the Margin: A Qualitative Study on the Perspectives of Economically Disadvantaged, Black Students Identified as Learning Disabled

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Voices from the Margin:

A Qualitative Study on the Perspectives of Economically Disadvantaged, Black Students

Identified as Learning Disabled

by

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A Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for the
Degree of
Doctor of Education
in Special Education
in the
Bagwell College of Education
Kennesaw State University

Kennesaw, GA
30144

Acknowledgments

I must acknowledge the wonderful staff at Kennesaw State University that has made this possible. I am grateful to my dissertation chair, Dr. Scott Ritchie, who helped me fine tune my approach to giving voice to a marginalized, ignored population. His guidance allowed me to challenge and reflect on my own thought process while improving the delivery of my content through the writing process.

I am also grateful to my other committee members, Dr. Natasha Thornton and Dr. Nihal Khote. Thank you all for believing in my work, noting the value of student voice, and pushing me to showcase my best. I would like to thank Dr. Thornton for being so supportive during this process by checking in on me and offering excellent feedback. I also want to give a special thanks to Dr. Khote for allowing me to push back in defense of my work and my students. That push gave me the opportunity to stand firm in my beliefs. I would also like to thank Kennesaw State University for allowing me to conduct this research.

A huge thank you also goes to the school administrators and teachers who allowed me to meet with students during their lunch and recess time. I appreciate your support in my endeavors.

Dedication

The journey toward the completion of this work was not an easy road. There were so many times that I wanted to quit, yet my students, without knowing, inspired me each day to press on for them. I am grateful to each and every student who has crossed by path from 2004 to present. This work is for you, your children, and your children's children.

This work is also for my mother, Bernadine Atwell. A woman who has supported me unconditionally before I could support my own neck. Thank you for the sacrifices, the discipline, the love, and the laughter. I am the woman I am because of you. Thank you for showing me what it means to be a Black woman who works hard despite the status quo *and* without settling for anything less than I am capable of or deserve.

And finally, I also dedicate this work to my granny, Grace Atwell, who was present at every graduation preceding this one. She gave birth to 10 children of her own, and then dedicated her life to training and supporting the mothers of newborns. Because of her, I know the depths of my roots and the power of the great I AM. My Granny never shrunk for anyone, yet simultaneously loved everyone fiercely. She passed those traits down to my mom and my mom to me. They taught me that being an Atwell woman was to be a servant and a warrior at the same time. Those traits have led me to be the educator, student, and woman I am today. This work is also in memory of Grace Atwell.

I can only hope to carry the essence of this work out into the world with the same tenacious love and compassion that they both possess.

Abstract

This study explores the perspectives of four economically disadvantaged, Black students who have been labeled as learning disabled and placed in the Special Education program. The voices of the students interviewed are used to develop unique, first-hand understandings of the cause of disproportionality among poor, Black children in Special Education with a learning dis/ability. Results from the data collected through individual and group interviews suggest that students do not regard themselves as dis/abled as they find themselves capable of learning and executing non-academic tasks that relate to their lived reality. Therefore, I argue that a historical, and therefore systemic, devaluation of the culture of poor, Black children has led many students to be erroneously viewed and classified as incapable by the American Education System.

Keywords: urban education, education, Critical Race Theory, Special Education, disproportionality, African-American, Black, Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy.

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Introduction

"School houses do not teach themselves - piles of brick and mortar and machinery do not send out men. It is the trained, living human soul, cultivated and strengthened by long study and thought, that breathes the real breath of life into boys and girls and makes them human, whether they be Black or White..." -W.E.B Dubois (Dubois, 1903)

The societal structure of education in the United States of America suggests that students who are poor and Black are inherently incapable of academic achievement. In 2015, 13% of Black students, as measured by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), were reported as performing at or above the proficient level in mathematics by the eighth grade while White students were performing at a rate of 43% at or above the proficient level. Economically, students eligible for free and reduced lunch through the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) were performing at a rate of only 18% at or above the proficient level, while 48% of ineligible students performed at or above the proficient level. Students with disabilities similarly reported a rate of only 12% at or above the proficient level while 40% of students without disabilities performed at or above the proficient level. (U.S. Department of Education, 2017)

The previously mentioned statistics present a major problem within the state of education. This data reports that students categorized as Black, economically disadvantaged, and/or dis/abled exhibit parallel performance that places them behind their White, middle and upper class, non-disabled peers. The problem with these statistics, however, is that the data erroneously suggests that these specific groups of students are less capable of achieving academic success.

In-depth analysis of this gap in performance suggests that the presence of a long history of systemic inequities may be a major contributing factor that negatively affects the achievements of subgroups categorized by race, class, and ability (Howard, 2009). While history may not be the sole determinant of this gap in academic performance, it important to note that the structure of education—particularly urban education—reflects the outcomes of macrolevel racism, capitalism and ableism on a microlevel. Consequently, I argue that the inherent structure of education *actively dis/ables students* and ultimately consigns them to academic failure (Connor, 2008). Students within the Black, economically disadvantaged, and disabled subgroups are not any less intelligent or capable than their White, middle class counterparts; instead, they have been labeled, forcefully defined, and provided limited opportunities to display success in a manner that does not meet their linguistic and cultural needs.

Recognizing that students categorized into these subgroups are reported as performing much lower than the general population of White, non-disabled, middle class children, however, is not enough (Darling-Hammond, 2009; Ford & Russo, 2016; Hull, et al., 2014). We must also explore the intersecting of these categories to develop a comprehensive understanding of the cause behind the issue. While we may not be able to solve such a deeply rooted problem with a single study, it is important that we address this issue from various perspectives and begin to discuss possible solutions and approaches to remedy the problem. Although the issue of disproportionality has been discussed at length by scholars in education, my study serves to diversify the common data sources used to address this problem by soliciting the vantage point of those most affected—the children.

Economically disadvantaged, Black students are placed into Special Education at a disproportionate rate to their White, middle and upper class peers under the guise of

underperformance (Ferri & Connor, 2014; Hull, et al., 2014; Connor, 2008; O'Connor & Fernandez, 2006; Skiba et al., 2005)—often discrediting the wealth of their own culture and lived experiences (Connor, 2008; Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014; Paris & Alim, 2017). Connor (2008) found that economically disadvantaged students of color were often categorized as learning disabled at school but led perfectly 'normal' lives within their community. The purpose of my study, therefore, is to understand how economically disadvantaged, Black students *respond* to being categorized as learning disabled at school.

In this study, I utilize the power of student voice to address the systemic inequities that have reduced the image of economically disadvantaged, Black students to low-scoring 'underachievers.' I explore how economically disadvantaged, Black students who have been labeled with a learning disability view their own "ability" within the confines of the classroom in contrast to their lived reality.

The remainder of this chapter follows a structure that begins with addressing the historical implications of race in America on the macrolevel and how it has led to the racialization of ability within the American school system on a microlevel. This brief history of racism in America illustrates the timeline of structural inequities that have contributed to the societal acceptance of categorizing, labeling, and disenfranchising Blacks in America.

Historical Analysis

On the macrolevel, the structure of American society is governed by who matters. In the present era of "Black Lives Matter" and the "#MeToo" movement, we witness individuals who have been commonly categorized, labeled, and disenfranchised begin to speak out and demand to be valued as human beings. On the opposite end, we also witness individuals who are staunch supporters of the status quo appearing almost insulted by the outcries of marginalized voices.

The American school system is no exception. It is primarily a reflection of the issues taking place at the macrolevel society; thus, perpetuating cycles that restrict individuals to the "status" or "category" that they were born into.

Those who are viewed as different from the constructed white, middle class norm have historically been barred from a quality learning experience (Hull, et al., 2014; Ford & Russo, 2016; Rotatori, Bakken, & Obiakor, 2011). Whether it was separate schooling or complete exclusion, groups were regularly constructed or ostracized due to race, class, and ability (Hull, et al., 2014). As this practice of exclusion became normalized in the American Education System, the noted achievement of those labeled as different began to lag significantly behind the White, middle class population—a direct result of those in control beginning to judge the ability of students of color (Hull, et al., 2014; Skiba et al., 2008).

This normalization of racism and classism are arguably the underlying cause for the disproportionate number of economically disadvantaged, Black students labeled with a learning disability. To substantiate this claim, it is important that I highlight the timeline of racism and ostracism in the United States.

In the following sections, I explore the divisive history of race and how it has impacted the accepted norm for ability and success. This historical overview adds to the discussion of how race has been directly and indirectly regarded in American society, in the American education system, and ultimately in the assessment of ability for students who do not identify as White and middle class. I offer a brief overview of centuries worth of racist ideals that have forced Black Americans to exist in a subordinate role throughout history and along the margins of present-day society. Addressing this historical pattern of racism reiterates that the racialization of ability in

schools is a byproduct of the normalized racism that has existed over the years. I begin with

highlighting facts from the 1700s and continue through to the present day 2000s.

Defining Personhood: Black = 60% Human

Since the founding of this country, the value of race in America has been a social issue.

Alexander (2010) asserts that the very structure of the original Constitution of the United States

of America was largely based on an effort to preserve slavery and afford political and economic

rights to White Americans only. This imperialist practice afforded White plantation owners a free

labor force that produced wealth. Federalism was then instituted to protect the rights and political

power of slave-holding states; thus, establishing the legal foundation of capitalism in America

(Anderson, 2007; Alexander, 2010; Foner, 1998). Slaves of African descent were defined as

three-fifths a person and denied the human rights granted by the constitution (Anderson, 2007;

Alexander 2010; Foner, 1998; Kelly, 2010)

This early legal structure that deemed Black Americans as three-fifths—equivalent to

60%—human established a position of subordinance for Blacks in America that has contributed

to the societal structure to the present day (Alexander, 2010). As literate slaves became a threat

to their masters and capable of a successful escape, Black Americans were violently denied the

right to an education (Alexander, 2010; Bly, 2008; Foner, 1998). By the time the constitution was

signed in 1776, fugitive slave records from Virginia revealed that the percentage of literate

African slaves was around a mere 5.4% of the population (Bly, 2008; Sublette & Sublette, 2015).

Today, over 250 years later, NAEP reports that only 16-18% of Black students are performing at

or above grade level in reading compared to nearly 50% of White students (U.S. Department of

Education, 2017). The juxtaposition of these startling statistics suggests that the source of the

present gap in achievement is rooted in a past that once forbid Blacks to obtain an education.

Because 16-18% of the population of Black students that are performing at or above grade level in reading today is a mere 10% increase from 1776, we must recognize that generations of forced illiteracy among Black Americans has had a lingering effect.

Defining Ability: Black = Intellectually Inferior

The Virginia code of 1849 placed harsh consequences on slaves and freedmen learning to read (Bly, 2008; Foner, 1998; Sublette & Sublette, 2015). Under this code, slaves attempting to learn to read were physically punished while those attempting to teach slaves to read were fined and imprisoned or could have their fingers severed (Sublette & Sublette, 2015). Under the guidance of Andrew Johnson, Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation that freed slaves in 1863 was quickly followed by the emergence of a new racially divisive system in the South known as Black Codes (Foner, 1998; Sublette & Sublette, 2015). Because the wealth of the South had been based solely on forced labor, the abolition of slavery essentially destroyed the Southern economy (Sublette & Sublette, 2015). White southerners viewed the Black Codes as a means to remedy their economic problems as these codes kept Blacks in a subordinate racial caste system (Foner, 2015). The codes revoked the civil rights of free Blacks and sought to reinstitute forced labor without using the term 'slavery' (Foner, 2015). Blacks, now free and attempting to establish economic stability on their own, were now having to return to the clutches of White landowners as sharecroppers (Sublette & Sublette, 2015). Therefore, while it appeared that Blacks would now be offered a more leveled playing field, the reality placed many Blacks in a position to seek sustainable work as oppose to an education (Foner, 2015).

Although the Civil Rights Act of 1866 challenged Black Codes by introducing the protection of the basic civil rights of Blacks, the start of the twentieth century brought on a new system of White dominance in the South—The Jim Crow Laws (Alexander, 2010; Foner, 2015;

Pilgrim, 2012; The Library of Congress, 2002). Following the *Plessy v. Ferguson* case of 1896,

the Supreme Court of the United States ruled that separate but equal was an acceptable way to

organize citizens as "social equality" was not a mandated component of the law. This ruling laid

the foundation for what became known as the Jim Crow Era—a time period in which Blacks

were legally restricted to separate facilities from Whites. Consequently, legal racist ideals

reinforced during the Jim Crow Era continued to shape the culture of social institutions by

adding to the perception that Black Americans were lesser beings (Alexander, 2010; Pilgrim,

2012; Yosso, 2005). This era ensured that Black communities were structurally placed at the

bottom of America's racial hierarchy nationwide (Foner, 2015). Black children were

consequently educated in separate schools from Whites with less resources and inadequate

facilities (Pilgrim, 2012). Black children were subject to inadequate facilities and overcrowded

classrooms while being forced to use outdated materials that had been used and discarded by

White students (Fairclough, 2000; Foner, 2008; Pilgrim 2012). As the awareness of the

deplorable conditions that Black students were subject to began to challenge the "separate but

equal" ruling of *Plessy v. Ferguson,* many Whites began to turn to the pseudoscientific concepts

of eugenics to justify their "rightful place" in society (Foner, 2015; Skiba et al, 2008). The

science of eugenics—a concept that suggests that races "other than those of northern European

stock were intellectually inferior" (Skiba et al, 2008, p. 265) was widely accepted by White

Americans and reinforced through the emergence of intelligence testing (Skiba et al., 2008).

Throughout the early 1900s, segregation laws continued to swell the culture of inferiority

for Black Americans. As this culture of inferiority continued to grow and define American

society, it contributed to the maintenance of an education system that maintained separate but

*un*equal facilities and resources for White and Black students (Pilgrim, 2012). The school system

essentially became a microcosm of the racial tension that existed in the larger society. Black

students were offered educational experiences that only sought to prepare them for lower paying

positions on the bottom rungs of society (Skiba et al, 2008).

By the 1950s, notable Black leaders began to seek equal protection under the law by

pushing to abolish racist laws that were responsible for oppressing the Black community. In

1954, the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling attempted to legally end segregation in public

schools (Cavendish, Artiles, & Harry, 2014). This ruling overturned the *Plessy v. Ferguson* case

of 1896 and asserted that segregation in public schools were unconstitutional. However, as stated

by Cavendish, et al. (2014), "the Brown decision did not remove the historical effect of under-

resourced segregated schools on students of color nor did it directly impact racist or

discriminatory beliefs or practices outside of public education" (p. 30). By this time, racism was

already a thread in the American fabric and the positioning of Blacks as inferior—regardless of

where they received their education—was treated as "common sense" (Mendoza, Paguyo, &

Guiterrez, 2016). Therefore, although nearly 100 years had passed since slavery was outlawed,

the ideology that Blacks were inherently lesser human beings became difficult to overcome

(Cavendish, Artiles, & Harry, 2014; Mendoza, Paguyo, & Guiterrez, 2016).

Defining Class: Black = Lack of Cultural Capital

As Black Americans continued the fight for equality after *Brown v. Broad of Education*,

White Americans who had grown comfortable with the status quo sought additional narratives

that would compound the discourse that Black Americans were lesser human beings and

therefore undeserving of an equal place in American society (Anderson, 2007; Cavedish et al.

2014). The cultural practices and linguistic patterns of economically disadvantaged, Black

students were not valued and viewed as a deficiency that needed to be fixed (Paris & Alim,

2015). Black students not matching the "gold standard—white, middle class, monolingual, [and] monocultural" were deemed deficient, less than, and inferior (Paris & Alim, 2015, p. 79).The current school system then inherently asked students to "lose or deny their languages, literacies, cultures, and histories in order to achieve in schools" (Alim & Paris, 2017, p. 1). Students who could not abide by this, were disabled and placed in special education (Artiles, 2011; Alim & Paris, 2017). The message that speaking and behaving in line with the gold standard as the way to success is conveyed to students of diverse economic and cultural backgrounds (Alim & Paris, 2015).

With such a divisive history, it is impossible to ignore how the perception of race has impacted the concept of equity in the modern American education system. As I evaluate this timeline of defining Black Americans from the 1700s to present, it is clear that the narrative that Black Americans are barely human, intellectually inferior, and lack the cultural capital needed to belong to society, has been unjustly accepted as the premise in which White Americans have come to regard Black Americans. This, therefore, presents itself as the contributing factors to the societal image of Black Americans—specifically Black children—as defunct human beings.

Although segregation by school is now illegal, the culture of inferiority that has emerged from centuries of oppression, remains an undercurrent that drives the reality of the current state of education. Public schools are now heavily segregated by race and ability (Cavendish, et al;, 2014). Therefore, it is important to recognize that the effects of the dis/abling process for Black Americans as a process that began in the age of slavery and plays a significant role in the way poor, Black children are perceived in the classroom. Recognizing the historical components of segregation in education allows us to better understand and then disrupt the current state of

American education for poor, Black students (Anderson, 2007; Alexander, 2010; Cavendish, et al; 2014).

Statement of the Problem

The unique cultures of economically disadvantaged, Black children have been systemically undervalued by American society. This process of undervaluation has forced students within this constructed subgroup to be labeled as deficient underperformers in the academic setting. The ability of Black children then becomes racialized as a disturbing pattern of subpar capital and human resources are afforded to schools with a majority Black population; thus, suggesting that Black students are less able, less valuable, and therefore less deserving of a high-quality education. Consequently, these students are labeled with a disability and placed into special education at a rate much higher than their White, middle- and upper- class peers.

Over the course of history, this so-called 'racialization of ability' has maintained detrimental effects on the quality of resources and course offerings in schools that have 80% or more economically disadvantaged, Black students in attendance as it determines the value of poor, Black children (Artiles, 2011). Decades after *Brown,* schools with high racial minority populations continue to have subpar capital and human resources as well as less access to challenging, Advanced Placement courses that would prepare Black students to participate fairly in a competitive society (Cavendish, Artiles, & Harry, 2014; Dixson & Rosseau. 2005); thus restricting access to exposure and opportunties. Such institutional occurrences suggest that the historical and systemic ideology of race remain deeply embedded in the structure of American schooling and the mindset of those in control; therefore, students of color are presumed not

worthy of the same quality of education as their middle-class, White peers (Cavendish, Artiles, &

Harry, 2014; Mendoza, Paguyo, & Guiterrez, 2016).

Although "researchers, practitioners, and students are still searching for the necessary

tools to effectively analyze and challenge the impact of race and racism in U.S. society," (Yosso,

2005, p. 70) it is important to recognize that there is an urgent need to disrupt the hegemonic

discourse that devalues the culture and ability of economically disadvantaged, Black students.

Therefore, while I recognize that learning disabilities do exist, this study seeks to contribute to

the body of knowledge that challenges this 'racialization of ability' (Artiles, 2011) that has

resulted in a disproportionate number of Black students being actively disabled by the school

system.

Any variation from what is accepted as the constructed gold standard—White, middle

class norm (Alim & Paris, 2015)—in American society is often described with vocabulary that

elicits negative connotations. Students uninterested in conforming to the accepted norm are

perceived as deficient and ultimately viewed as inferior, categorized for their differences, and

excluded under "lawful" regulations that seek to manage or control their differences (Alexander,

2010; Emdin, 2016; Mendoza, Paguyo, & Guiterrez, 2016; Paris & Alim, 2015).

Connor (2015) found that many economically disadvantaged, students of color only wore

the label of disability at school. In other settings those students performed appropriately in

accordance with the culture and community in which they lived. Therefore, this practice of

dis/abling students through the 'racialization of ability' (Artiles, 2011) made it permissible to

continually sort and ostracize individuals based on their variance from the golden standard as

opposed to ensuring equity in access to quality resources, exposure, and opportunities.

Consequently, American society has collectively come to accept that individuals not matching

the description of White, middle class persons are inherently abnormal and do not belong with this "dominant" group (Ford & Russo, 2016; Howard, 2010; Mendoza, Paguyo, & Guiterrez, 2016).

This study, using the theoretical framework of DisCrit (Disability Studies/Critical Race Theory), addresses and challenges the systemic inequalities that have led to the overidentification of economically disadvantaged, Black students as students with learning disabilities (Ford & Russo, 2016; National Education Association, 2007). In contrast to the familiar discussion of disproportionality, this study invites the voices of the children affected to share their perspective on what it means to be a child growing up in their environment and labeled as disabled. These minoritized groups of students are considered to deviate greatly from the accepted norm; that deviance is commonly viewed as a problem that needs to be fixed and controlled. This need to maintain control over these "deviant" populations has led many individuals of the "dominant" group to feel justified in excluding this population and providing just enough education to be the functional underclass of society (Cavendish, Artiles, & Harry, 2014; Howard, 2010; National Education Association, 2007). Students within these minoritized subgroups are often referred for special education services at an alarmingly rate by educators who may be skilled in academia, but who are unwilling to appeal to the unique cultural needs of minoritized students (Chu, 2011; Ford & Russo, 2016).

Purpose of Study

As the historical overvaluation of Whiteness and undervaluation of Blackness elicits a dis/abling process for Black students in education, the purpose of my study is to understand how economically disadvantaged, Black students *respond* to being categorized as learning disabled (Connor, Ferri, & Annamma, 2016). With Disability Studies/Critical Race Theory (DisCrit) as

my theoretical framework, I explore how the intersectionality of being economically disadvantaged and Black has become a false predictor of ability. The study explores (a) the LD referral process (b) the recognition of cultural identity in the classroom and (c) student perception of the intersection of race, ability, and economic status.

This study endeavors to disrupt what has been historically accepted as the "gold standard"—the White, middle class norm—by questioning the systemic structures in American society that dis/able those who do not meet the "gold standard" (Alim & Paris, 2015). The narratives of the students most harshly affected could potentially challenge common notions to evaluate his or her own conceptual understanding of success. It is my desire that as various readers begin to evaluate their positionality on educational equity for students of diverse economic and cultural backgrounds, they undergo a change in basic assumptions that encourages them to consider factors outside of dis/ability as it relates to economically-disadvantaged, Black students.

This study includes the narratives of four economically-disadvantaged, Black (see Definition of Term, below) 11-year-old students in the fourth and fifth grades who were referred to special education in elementary school at or before the age of nine. I interview students individually as well as collectively. Through the interview process, I ask questions that reveal how they have come to view the construct of race, economic status, and ability, as well as how they have come to view their own ability and access to success. I also review Student Support Team (SST) documentation in each student's permanent file to collect data on the circumstances in which each participant was referred to special education.

Research Questions

The research questions that guide this study are: (1) How do Economically Disadvantaged (ED), Black students who have been identified as Learning Disabled (LD) perceive their own dis/ability in school in contrast to their lived reality? (2) What do ED, Black students who have been identified as LD perceive as a barrier to their own academic success?

Significance of Study

The dis/abling process that occurs for ED, Black students in education has led to a disproportionate number of referrals to special education for Black/African-American students (Cavendish, Artiles, & Harry, 2014; Connor, Ferri, & Annamma, 2016). Educators who are not aware of this occurrence abide by what has been called the 'myth of meritocracy.' This myth subconsciously embraces the dominant ideology of the White, middle class culture and ignores the systemic implications of race and racism (Mendoza, Paguyo, & Guiterrez, 2016). The myth asserts that if 'people of color' simply worked hard, they would be able to experience high levels of success (Alexander, 2010; Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Howard, 2010). This myth has been repeatedly discredited through the work of Critical Race Theorists who utilize student voice to demonstrate that the perception of race continues to play a negative role in the education system; thus, causing significant roadblocks to success for economically disadvantaged, Blacks regardless of effort (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Rosseau & Dixson, 2005; Yosso, 2005).

This study aims to contribute to the growing body of knowledge on the intersection of economic status, race, and ability and its effects on the disproportionality in achievement for Black students. While disproportionality in Special Education has been discussed at length in academia, my study particularly addresses this issue by regarding it through the eyes of the

students affected. I have found that the study of Critical Race Theory (see Definition of Terms,

below) in education in conjunction with Disability Studies (formally known as DisCrit) largely

gives voice to educators, high school students, and college students. As a result, I take a slightly

different approach by inviting elementary school students to offer their perspective on the

intersectionality of being economically disadvantaged, Black, and categorized as learning

disabled. As these youngsters become more developmentally aware of their 'place' in the world,

their vantage point adds a much-needed perspective to the current body of research on the

intersectionality of race, class, and ability (Anthony, 2017). In essence, I am looking at the point

in which the young, Black, economically disadvantaged child begins to see him or herself in the

world.

Definition of Terms

Black – The term Black is used to define a racial group that is inclusive of members of the

African Diaspora (ie. African, African-American, Afro-Caribbean, etc.)

Critical Race Theory (CRT) – CRT, as defined by Delgado (2012), is comprised of several

interconnected tenets that suggest racism has become a normalized component of everyday life.

Within this this study I focus on three of those tenets: (1) the effects of "colorblindness" as it

relates to the special education referral process in education (2) the social construction of race

and ability (3) the counterstories of economically disadvantaged, Black students who have been

labeled as learning disabled.

Capital – The term capital, which I most commonly used with the phrase "Cultural Capital,"

describes the wealth or assets one holds.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) – CRP, as defined by Gloria Ladson-Billings (1999),

challenges deficit views of Black students and encourages educators to consider the wealth of

experiences and culture many students bring into the classroom.

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP) – CSP extends the work of CRP and encourages educators

to build on the concept of linguistic and cultural pluralism to sustain the cultural identity of

individual students while exposing students to the 'dominant' culture (Paris, 2012).

Disability Studies (DS) – DS is an emerging field that encompasses scholarly research on

disability and its mutual impact on culture and society (Gabel, 2005).

Dis/ability Critical Race Studies (DisCrit) – DisCrit is at the intersection of Dis/ability Studies

and Critical Race Theory. This framework examines the role of race in defining ability. It brings

into question the racialization of ability among students of color (Annamma, Connor, & Ferri,

2016).

Deviant – cultures that differ from the constructed norm (White, middle class males). In this

study, I use deviant as a term to reinforce the negative connation that cultures that differ from the

status quo are given.

Dominant – the imposed standard constructed to reflect the accepted norm for race, class, and

ability.

Economically Disadvantaged (ED) – students who qualify for free or reduced-price meals in

schools based on household income. Within this study, I often use the term class to focus on the

variances between the economically disadvantaged and the middle class.

Exclusion – The process of being ostracized or excluded based on race, social class, or other

minoritized group membership.

Memory Walk – The process of recalling a period of time in one's life by discussing specific events or artifacts.

Racialization of Ability – the assumption that students of color are less capable than White students (Artiles, 2011).

Voice(s) – refers to the first-hand narratives and experiences of individuals as outlined in the tenets of Critical Race Theory (Delgado, 2012).

Organization of Study

In this chapter, I have introduced my research topic, theoretical framework, and research questions, as well as the purpose, significance, and organization of this study, as well as a definition of terms.

In Chapter 2, I delve into the existing literature on the effects of race and socioeconomic status on academic achievement. In this chapter I highlight how class, race, and dis/ability have often been examined in isolation without regard to intersectionality. This allows me to draw the reader's attention to the multiple barriers that economically disadvantaged, Black children face when it comes to academic achievement. I then explore how the intersection of class, race, and ability in education has led many to accept the misperception of economically disadvantaged, Black students as subpar performers in education (Cavendish, Artiles, & Harry, 2014; Mendoza, Paguyo, & Guiterrez, 2016; National Education Association, 2007).

In chapter 3, I discuss the methodology used to drive this study. Here I outline my research design as well as the theoretical framework used to support my design. I also include a description of the research participants and the demographics selected for my study.

Through the integration of student voice, Chapter 4 uses the counter-narratives of these minoritized subgroups to explore how students categorized into groups that focus on their

deviance from the accepted White, middle class norm, view their own ability. This portion of the study specifically answers the questions: (1) How do Economically Disadvantaged (ED), Black students who have been identified as Learning Disabled (LD) perceive their own dis/ability? (2) What do ED, Black students who have been identified as LD perceive as a barrier to their own academic success?

Chapter 5 offers a final discussion of the results of my research. Here, I detail my expectations for this research and how they were met or challenged. I discuss the implications of my findings and illustrate how the themes that emerged from the data can improve the quality of learning for economically disadvantaged, Black students. Finally, I offer suggestions for future research that could potentially build on this study and provide an additional lens for understanding the lived reality for this constructed group of students.

Chapter Two – Literature Review

"In this country American means white. Everybody else has to hyphenate." – Toni Morrison

In this chapter, I review literature on Critical Race Theory (CRT), Disability Studies (DS), and Dis/ability Critical Race Studies (DisCrit) as it relates to student voice. I then identify potential connections to deeply-rooted historical issues of exclusion based upon perceived race, class, and "ability" in education as a foundational contributor to the over-representation of economically disadvantaged, Black children in Special Education. I begin with an introduction of Dis/ability Critical Studies (DisCrit) and the rationale for using this framework to drive my study. Then, I revisit the historical implications of exclusion in America and how such factors have influenced our approach to race, class, and ability. To further illustrate the historical process of exclusion and its presence in the American school system, I discuss the exclusionary practices by social class as a historical starting point and subsequently add exclusion by race, and then exclusion by ability. I use this timeline to argue that the root of the issue with economically disadvantaged, Black children's being placed in special education at disproportionate rates stems from their intersectional existence in three constructed subgroups that have been historically undervalued and excluded from American society.

Theoretical Framework

In this section of Chapter Two, I explore existing literature on the framework that supports this historical discussion on classism, racism, and ableism—Dis/ability Critical Studies (DisCrit). I begin with the concept of stereotypical threat as it relates to socioeconomic status (SES). I then go into a discussion of Critical Race Theory (CRT)—a growing field that focuses on taking a critical stance in defining the construct of race in American society. I follow up the

discussion of CRT with the discussion of Disability Studies (DS)—a framework that explores the complexities of disability to consider its context—to make the claim that there is a lack of research that focuses on the context of economically disadvantaged, Black students labeled with a learning disability. Finally, I illustrate how the two frameworks, CRT and DS work collaboratively to offer a new perspective entitled DisCrit that intersects race and ability to provide a more holistic understanding of the dis/abling process for economically disadvantaged, Black students.

Socioeconomic Status (SES) and Stereotypical Threat

The perceptions of economically disadvantaged, Black children constituted from societal stereotypes play a significant role in achievement (Lam, 2014; Sanbonmatsu, et al., 2006; Spencer & Castano, 2007). The stereotypes that have been generated from centuries of defining and disqualifying Black Americans negatively influence the expectations for academic performance from teachers, parents, and students (Lam, 2014). This subsequently maintains a cycle of generational poverty in a society that values education and credentials for gainful employment (Lam, 2014).

Expectations for academic performance are often judged by class and race causing economically disadvantaged, Black students to be regarded as deficient from the moment they enter the classroom (Lam, 2014; Sanbonmatsu, et al., 2006; Spencer & Castano, 2007). These students are met with low expectations and are assumed to have engaged with less stimulating resources at home and/or subject to poor parenting—all without accurate evidence or regard to individual situations (Lam, 2014). These low expectations consequently have a negative effect on student performance as students begin to perform based how they are judged by others (self-fulfilling prophesy); thus demonstrating that the stereotypes placed on economically

disadvantaged, Black children are a threat to their perception of self and inhibit their ability to be successful (Spencer & Castano, 2007). Furthermore, I argue that the cultural bias of intelligence tests is such that the true measure of the test child's ability is contingent upon his exposure and ability to conform to White, Middle Class culture (Jensen, 1969).

As a heavily classist society historically characterized by an imbalance of power between upper/middle class citizens and working class citizens at the macrolevel, the overvaluation of middle- and upper-class communities and the undervaluation of economically disadvantaged communities have led many individuals to unjustly regard economic status as a determinant for success on the microlevel (Spencer & Castano, 2007).

To explore the way individuals respond to negative stereotypes on the microlevel, an empirical study was conducted to explore the likelihood of students to perform in response to their perceived value by Spencer & Castano (2007). These authors used a "2 X 2 factorial design:" Diagnostic/Salient, Diagnostic/Non-Salient, Non-Diagnostic/Salient, Non-Diagnostic/Non-Salient to analyze forty-six participants on varied racial backgrounds with an average range of $65,000-$80,000/year in parental income. Participants were assigned an objective task derived from the GRE, and a subjective task that also measured the students' confidence level while completing the task. Spencer & Castano (2007) found that the performance of their participants did indeed prove that there is an alarming shift in performance based on stereotypical threats for individuals of lower SES. The confidence of these individuals tends to be lower, and their performance defies their true intellectual ability. The findings of this study suggest that further research in this area allows us to "find a way to combat the stereotyping and prejudice of low-SES individuals and the negative impact that these have on their lives" (Spencer & Constano, 2007, p. 429).

Gigi Lam (2014) adds this discussion of socioeconomic status and academic achievement by highlighting the low caliber of course offerings provided to economically disadvantaged children based on the assumption that this constructed subgroup possesses less stimulating resources at home. Lam (2014) notes that parents living in poverty are often vulnerable to reactive and neglectful parenting, depression, and low self-esteem as they deal with life-stressing events that often result from a lack of economic resources. Such parents unfortunately develop a bleak view of the future that is indirectly passed on to their children. As children, particularly those in early and middle childhood, internalize these attitudes, their motivation for learning is diminished (Lam, 2014). Teachers, Lam (2014) continues, also play a role in perpetuating this cycle. Students of lower economic status are often prejudged due to their lack of resources and exposure. These teachers presume low ability because of attendance, stereotypical ideals, and intrinsic motivation. It is here that students are tracked into low ability classes, offered a subpar educational experience, and returned to the matrix of generational poverty (Lam, 2014).

In 2002, Sanbonmatsu, Kling, Duncan, & Brooks-Gunn (2006) conducted a mixed-methods study on the correlation between neighborhood and academic achievement. In an experiment entitled, *Moving to Opportunity* (MTO), several families living in poverty were offered vouchers that would afford them the opportunity to reside in a less impoverished community. Using a randomized design, Sanbonmatsu and colleagues (2006) collected data from over 3,000 of those families after they had been enrolled in the program for four to seven years. Children over the age of eight were interviewed about their lives inside and outside of school while parents were interviewed on their perception of their child's lives inside and outside of school. Data from this extensive study revealed that the children of families in the MTO program did not exhibit a significant improvement in achievement (Sanbonmatsu et al., 2006). Younger

students between the ages of five and 11 demonstrated the more substantial gains yet still did not satisfy the hypothesis that students moving into a less impoverished community would almost immediately begin to thrive in school (Sanbonmatsu et al., 2006). This finding led Sanbonmatsu et al. (2006), to point out, that although the opportunity to move to a community of choice, three-fifths of families selected communities that were only slightly less impoverished with a high minoritized population. Children reported a lack of improvement in the education climate of their new schools. This led researchers to question the presence of an additional layer of discrimination that maintained limitations to high-quality schooling (Sanbonmatsu, 2006). They concluded that "interventions focused exclusively on neighborhoods rather than on factors directly related to the child, family, and school are unable to solve the myriad problems of children growing up in poverty" (Sanbonmatsu, 2006, p. 686). In other words, this study demonstrates that while socioeconomic status is a contributing factor to student achievement, other factors must be explored in order to address the issue holistically.

These studies collectively highlight the enormity of the problem that confronts the economically disadvantaged student. They demonstrate that merely the expectation of failure plays a significant role in how an individual who is defined in this category views his or her own academic potential. Each study, however, vaguely focuses on the constructs of race and the additional layer of dis/abling that takes place when race is introduced. In the subsequent portions of this chapter, I examine the additional layers of marginalization that children of the economically disadvantaged, Black subgroup must endure when being measured academically.

Critical Race Theory

As new forms of oppression emerged each time new legislation attempted to address racial inequality in American society, Critical Race Theory (CRT) emerged as a framework used to address the normalization of racism and disrupt the status quo as it relates to race in America (Connor, 2015). Studies in CRT have supported the notion that the oppression of people of color have become so ingrained in American culture that it has become unrecognizable to the oppressor and everyday life for the oppressed (Tasha et al., 2016).

The school system, as an institutionalized reflection of the larger society, maintains the same problem (Connor, 2015). The normalization of racism has deemed it permissible to enforce White, middle class ideals as standard knowledge while silencing the accounts and perspectives of others; thus the "stories of Blacks are muted and erased" (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 25). In other words, these students are expected to disregard their own realities and emotions as Blacks to assimilate to the dominant culture. Edmin (2016) likens this practice to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as he describes the experience of being consistently muted, silenced, and powerless as a source of trauma that inhibits students from recognizing who they are. Cochran-Smith (2000) adds to this discussion with her belief that the idea that racism is a concept that all educators must constantly struggle to unlearn as it is passively accepted as a byproduct of living in a racist society. She goes on to state that the realization of the racist ideals that many educators enter the classroom with is challenging for educators to acknowledge and unlearn. Therefore, I have committed to this work as doing my part in addressing the active dis/abling process of economically disadvantaged, Black students in today's school system.

Ladson-Billings (1998) asserts that "if we look at the way that public education is currently configured, it is possible to see the ways that CRT can be a powerful explanatory tool

for the sustained inequity that [Blacks] experience" (p.24). Beyond the muting of the historical accounts of Blacks in the construction of knowledge, Ladson-Billings (1998) also discusses the restricted access to rigorous curriculum, presumptuous instruction, biased assessment, and unequal school funding that plague the field of education as it relates to Black students. These structural issues reinforce a racially divided society that sends the message that Black children are inadequate, or unworthy, of a high-quality educational experience.

To further exemplify this point, I present the work of Bettina L. Love. Love's (2012) study reveals the voice of a population of children that are often overlooked. Love states that if we are to make plans for how we instruct children, we must include the perspective of the children affected. In her book *Hip Hop Li'l Sistas Speak: Negotiating Hip Hop Identities and Politics in the New South,* Love exposes the voice of young Black females through complexities of maturing into womanhood with the strong influence of Hip Hop. She conducts an ethnographical study on six Black females in middle and high school at a community center. The perceptions of the young ladies in the study reflect a grim reality of what young Black girls are struggling with as they come of age.

Using the conceptual framework of critical theory, Love employs an ethnographic methodology over a period of one and a half years. Data was collected through structured group and individual interviews, field observations (as she was also employed by this community center during this time), and non-structured interviews of the six young ladies. While Love (2012) pulled from a variety of sources, she credits her formal interviews as her primary source of data for this study. She conducted a range of five to nine individual interviews with each girl and a total of four group interviews.

Throughout her study, Love (2012) learns that the girls do not think highly of themselves and other Black women due to the images portrayed in music videos. As they compared themselves to White females, the young ladies described White females as women who made better life choices. Ultimately, the young ladies viewed the role of a Black woman as inferior to that of a White woman.

Love's (2012) study highlights the reality of embedded messages within society that can consistently affect a child's self-image. As she provides insight to the lived reality of these young ladies, the discussions reveal that youth are aware of the messages being conveyed to their community about race (and gender) but seldom have the opportunity to discuss it. The self-image that the young ladies in this study developed can have a direct correlation to their school performance and approach to success.

In another study, Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso (2010) examined the campus racial climate for African-American college students. These researchers conducted a focus group inclusive of thirty-four Black students at predominantly White universities. In these focus groups, Solorzano et al. (2010) explored the presence of microaggressions—subtle forms of racial discrimination, and how Black students responded to it. They found that the Black students interviewed often felt muted, ignored, and devalued because of their race. These students felt that they were often defined and addressed by their race and not their actual ability by non-Black classmates and professors (Solorzano et al., 2010). To cope with the weight of dealing with feelings of worthlessness within these institutions, students either created counter-spaces that celebrated their Blackness or transferred to Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Students who were most severely impacted by microaggressions left their university all together.

(Solorzano et al, 2010). This study reveals that the negative influences brought on by racial stereotypes can have a detrimental effect on one's ability to freely access their full potential.

In a similar account of the experiences of Black undergraduate students, Ebony O. McGee and David Stovall (2015) utilize critical race theory to highlight the effects of social inequality on the mental health of Black college students. McGee & Stovall (2015) offer the accounts of Black women who struggle to matriculate through their college and internship programs while ignoring the microaggressions that cloud their world. In one counternarrative account, a female African – American student exclaimed the feelings of powerlessness, worthiness, and inferiority experienced during her summer engineering internship at a well-known company. During the internship, she was assigned menial tasks by her superiors. When she requested more challenging work, she was immediately reminded of her 'place' within the company as a Black female from a Historically Black College/University. After her advisor, also a Black woman, advised her to grin and bear it, she found herself in an anxious and suicidal state (McGee & Stovall, 2015). Such an account reiterates how traumatic, racially charged experiences can leave deep feelings of worthlessness and despair with our most vulnerable population—children.

Disability Studies

Dis/ability, particularly learning disability, is yet another construct that I would argue is developed from the outsider's perspective. Connor (2015) supports this ideal with the statement that "people are not inherently disabled; it is society that dis/ables them" (p. 36). Disability Studies (DS) challenges the construction of dis/ability as a concept imposed by an oppressive body. DS theorists have come to regard dis/ability as a perception brought forth by those who

regarded variance of ability as a deviation from the norm and something to be controlled or managed.

Disability Studies is described as an interdisciplinary approach to deconstructing and redefining disability (Beratan, 2008; Connor, 2015). The focus that society places on individuals with disabilities seeks to further marginalize them into categories that allows only the middle class and above to feel comfortable (Collins et al., 2016). Prior to the onset of disability studies, disability was only viewed as a fixed label used to identify the so-called deviation from the accepted norm (Collins et al., 2016; Connor, 2015). Disability studies, however, regains control of this phenomenon imposed by the dominating class and "unabashedly challenges traditional boundaries of social conventions, including notions of 'normal' and deviations from established 'norms' that enable some people while dis/abling others" (Connor, 2015, p. 38).

Prior to Conner's work, several researchers attempted to explore disability and its origins. In Klassen's 2010 study on the self-efficacy of adolescents with learning disabilities, he found that students identified as learning disabled rated their ability to self-regulate their learning lower than their non-disabled peers. Klassen (2010) posits that self-regulation is necessary for students to plan, establish, and evaluate their own academic goals. Deficits in this area, Klassen (2010) argues, negatively affect self-efficacy and the ability to develop adequate learning habits. To reach this conclusion, Klassen (2010) interviewed a total of 146 students in eighth and ninth grades, 73 of which were identified as having a learning disability and 73 of which did not. Ninety percent of this sample, however, consisted of students of European descent from middle to upper socioeconomic backgrounds; thus, demonstrating an omission of the voice of economically disadvantaged, Black students.

Crane, Zusho, Ding, and Cancelli (2016) explored Klassen's (2010) findings further by examining the performance of students identified as learning disabled in academic and non-academic settings. While these researchers agreed that self-efficacy was vital to successful academic performance, they questioned whether students with learning disabilities were performing the same across all domains—academic and non-academic. Crane et al. (2016) sampled 29 students attending a private school for children with special needs in New York City. They found that most students experienced low levels of self-efficacy in academic tasks, and higher levels of self-efficacy on non-academic tasks. This study, however, is limited in context as it fails to mention the race and socioeconomic status of participants (Crane et al., 2016). Additionally, the study was conducted in a private school dedicated to serving students with disabilities in small class sizes with the support of multiple educators in the classroom—a setting that is in complete contrast to the common learning experiences of economically disadvantaged, Black children.

These studies in disability demonstrate that most research into disability has been conducted in a relatively homogeneous setting that does not consider the impact of race and economic diversity; thus, omitting the voice and experiences of economically disadvantaged, Black children who have been labeled with a learning disability.

Intersections of CRT & DS

While several studies have been conducted to examine socioeconomic status, race, and disability as individual constructs, the overrepresentation of economically disadvantaged, Black students labeled with a learning disability calls for an examination of the intersectionality of the three. Critical Race Theory and Disability Studies, for example, share a common ground that addresses a possible cause for the perceived failure of Black students in present American

society. Dis/ability Critical Race Studies (DisCrit) serves to connect Critical Race Theory (CRT) with Disability Studies (DS) to examine the way the intersectionality of dis/ability and race addresses the disproportionate number of students of color perceived as academic and social failures. DisCrit posits that racism and ableism work co-dependently validating and reinforcing the other; thus, prohibiting the perception of ability from existing in isolation from race. With the previous discussion of this historic approach to racism and ableism serving as a root cause for present day inequities, DisCrit reiterates how the construction of these concepts were normalized in American society (Connor, Ferri, & Annamma, 2016). As Connor (2008) argued in his study of Black and Hispanic students that have been categorized as learning disabled, "issues of race and class continue to be underrepresented in traditional special education research" (p. 16).

The convergence of CRT and DS gives rise to the reality that Blacks labeled with a dis/ability are subject to a much different experience than White students with a dis/ability (Collins et al., 2016; Connor, 2015). The dangerous assumptions that revolve around race and ability have essentially normalized the racialization of ability and placed Black students with dis/abilities in a position to be isolated even further from society (Collins, et al., 2016). In other words, it has become the norm to view Black students in relation to ability; thus, making it nearly impossible for their identities as Blacks and their abilities to exist in isolation of each other (Collins et al., 2016; Connor, Ferri, & Annamma, 2016).

Disability studies (DS) posit that the social construct of disability does not exist as it is only based on perception. DS alone does not consider how already marginalized Black students, particularly those from an economically disadvantaged background, are actually further segregated from the main population. The intersection of being a student who is Black, economically disadvantaged, and labeled as disabled presents a three-fold marginalized status

that is often overlooked in current literature. Previous studies in dis/ability improperly suggested that all individuals who are labeled as disabled were subject to similar experiences (Collins et al., 2016). However, regarding disability without regard to "historical, social, and cultural contexts," impose limitations to fully understanding the intersections of race *and* culture (Connor, 2015, p. 42). These students, even prior to being labeled with a dis/ability, have often been subject to segregated schools with fewer resources, separate classrooms, and harsh, terminal disciplinary actions. White, middle class students, however, experience a different reality when labeled with a dis/ability than Black students with disabilities from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Black students do not appear to be treated with the same care that implies that they can eventually 'catch up' and develop the self-regulation strategies needed to be successful (Collins et al., 2016; Crane, et al., 2016; Klassen, 2010). Instead, they are pushed out further (Collins et al., 2016).

DisCrit seeks to expose and dissect the way our society has normalized and accepted these practices as truth. From this theory we can learn that the effects of intersectionality continue to be detrimental to the development of our society as students continue to be marginalized in a manner that does not provide them the opportunities for academic, social, and emotional growth (Connor, Ferri, and Annamma, 2016).

Alongside the historical changes discussed from colonialism through slavery and eugenics, the concept of ownership evolved from concrete land ownership to a more abstract state of being. In other words, the privilege to collectively possess whiteness, middle-class status, and 'ability' as property granted individuals admittance to the "norm" while others struggled greatly to belong (Ladson-Billings, 1998).

Theorists have used intersections of race and ability to study the profound effects of not possessing the ideals of Whiteness, middle-class status, and "ability." Individuals considered deviant from the constructed norm—white, middle class, and able-bodied—have consistently been categorized and separated from the so-called majority. It cannot be reiterated enough that the established institutionalized norms that became the fabric of American culture desperately needs to be revealed, addressed, and dismantled.

Through my research of the intersectionality of class, race, and ability, I have found that there is a limited number of researchers that have explored the intersectionality of race and dis/ability from the student's perspective. Connor (2015) is among the few practitioners who has used the voice of students directly affected by the racialization of ability. The narrative that students of color who come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds are inherently deficient, has been normalized to the extent that the lived reality of these students are seldom used to gauge true ability and success. For this reason, there is a need for counter-stories to be told by the students most affected.

DisCrit seeks to dismantle what is commonly accepted as it relates to race and disability in education and reimagine a more fitting narrative that offers a more holistic view of student achievement (Connor, Ferri, & Annamma, 2016). Because "racism operate[s] in more complex and covert ways than just explicit and deliberate hatred and discrimination," (p. 183) it is imperative that DisCrit scholars employ methods that allow the voice of the oppressed to be heard (Beratan, 2008). This act of counter-storytelling can be used as "a tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege" (Soloranzo & Yosso, 2002, p. 133). These counter-stories function as a way of building community around similarly marginalized individuals while bringing new revelation to the plight of the community,

transforming established belief systems, and constructing another perspective that illustrates a richer existence (Soloranzo & Yosso, 2002). With the use of DisCrit, this study advances the argument that economically disadvantaged, Black children are being actively disabled in the school system, while leading lives that require a particular set of skills that challenge the presence of disability.

One study using the DisCrit framework and the art of story-telling can be found in the book *Urban Narratives,* by former Special Education teacher David J. Connor. *Urban Narratives* (2015) explores the intersectionality of class, race, and ability through the lens of those most affected—the students. Connor focuses his attention on eight students of color labeled with a learning disability (LD). He engages each child in offering a counter-narrative to what is collectively assumed about working class people of color with disabilities. This allows the students to distinguish themselves from the confines of societal perspectives and share their counter stories on the educational system and their role within.

Connor (2015) utilizes a complex convergence of Critical Race Theory (CRT), Disability Studies (DS), and LatCrit—a Critical Race Theory as it related to the Latinx population—to examine the lives of these individuals as they tell their stories. His merging of CRT and DS later became known as DisCrit. Connor's study revealed a collective sense of resilience among the students that demonstrated that while their label may have defined them in one setting, it did not define them in all settings. This led some students to simply accept their 'struggles' and continue working towards their personal goals, while others hid their label and worked to manage their lives 'normally.'

In one student's account of being LD, she describes the anxiety she would often experience in the classroom when called upon to answer a question. "Is this what it means to be

LD?" (p. 74), she asks to better understand the emotional shift she experienced within the classroom. As she discusses her childhood and a few traumatic experiences that may have led her to struggle in school, she shares one major point—outside of school, she must be independent. This was a common thread I noted throughout the student accounts of their experiences. The students seemed to be aware of the 'disappearance' of their disability outside of the school setting. This illustrated the multi-facets of their identity and their ability to function as 'normal' when not held to a measure they could not relate to (Connor, 2015).

Another student that stood out in Connor's study is Michelle. Michelle recognized the need to measure up to a constructed norm for "White people" by stating, "It's a White person that makes [the tests], so it makes it harder for a Black or Latino to pass it. … Made by a White person, is for a White person" (Connor, 2015, p. 184). This assessment of the situation forces one to consider how painfully obvious it has become to students of color that their success is not valued in the same manner as Whites; thus, demonstrating the dire need to have those voices heard so change can be made.

Conclusively, in describing the intersection of race and disability, Connor's students seem keenly aware of their struggles, yet recognize that those struggles do not exist in every area of their lives. In other words, their disability seems only to exist in the school setting, but not in other areas of their lives. Their accounts for what they have experienced as people of color labeled with learning disabilities provides "alternative narratives to traditional portrayals of deficit, disorder, and dysfunction" (Connor, 2015, p. 380).

In this chapter, I have provided a look into current literature that has preceded my research in Critical Race Theory (CRT), Disability Studies (DS), and Disability Critical Race Theory (DisCrit). While the research presented in each area is not exhaustive, it reflects research

that includes the first-hand perspectives of the target group through interviews and observations. Within this literature, I have found that there is a lack of first-hand perspectives from younger students. With this study, I endeavor to insert the voice of elementary aged students who have been affected by the systemic process of categorizing and labeling children through exploring and sharing the constructed realities of a population that is often muted (Connor, 2015). In the following chapter, I discuss the methodology I use to address this intersectionality of class, race, and ability as a construct in contrast to the lived reality of the students affected.

Chapter Three: The Meaning-Making Process

Telling stories is essentially a meaning-making process. When people tell stories, they

select details of their experience from their stream of consciousness…Individuals'

consciousness give access to the most complicated social and educational issues, because

social and educational issues are abstractions based on the concrete experience of people.

(Seidman, 2006, p. 7)

The purpose of my study is to understand how economically disadvantaged, Black

students *respond* to being categorized as learning disabled in a manner that provides a more

holistic understanding of the intersection between class, race, and ability from students'

perspectives. I chose to use student voice to offer a different vantage point for addressing the

issue of disproportionality. As an educator, I have found myself as well as other educators'

making significant decisions for children without the input of children. Furthermore, as an

educator in an economically-disadvantaged community with a primarily Black population, I

found that these decisions were often in spite of children as opposed to being in the interests of

children. Consequently, I chose to interview children from this constructed sub-group to better

understand how they respond to being categorized as learning disabled. This response, I

speculate, gives educators and researchers insight on how to effectively address the devaluation

of economically disadvantaged, Black students in school.

The way meaning is constructed through the lived experiences of individuals guides us

towards a better understanding of the issues faced in social institutions (Hacyn, 1985; Seidman,

2006). Therefore, to explore the relationship between the number of economically

disadvantaged, Black students labeled as learning disabled and their academic achievement, I

conducted a phenomenological interview study. Societal structures like education are "best

understood through the experiences of the individuals whose work and lives are the stuff upon which the abstractions are built" (Seidman, 2006, p. 9).

Using the theoretical framework of DisCrit, I selected interviewing as my primary data collection method to offer voices to a specific group of children who have been marginalized due to their race, economic status, and assumed ability (Connor, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 1998). My interest in sharing the stories of these children has developed from my role as a Black educator in low-income, Black communities as well as my own early childhood as a Black girl in a low-income, predominately Hispanic community. The experiences that I have had as an educator and student in these communities suggest to me that the stories and perspectives of the children most vulnerable to marginalization have not been valued as data needed to make effective, sustainable change. Therefore, I use interviewing to affirm the voice of the thrice-marginalized child as I gain insight through the meaning they have constructed from their experiences (Seidman, 2006).

I use Student Support Team (SST) data as a secondary data source. SST data is the tiered collection of the documentation of interventions used to address the student's academic needs submitted by the referring teacher and subsequent teachers (Kent, et al., 2001; Lee-Tarver, 2006). This is data that is collected prior to referring a child for Special Education and often treated as a direct route to determining special education eligibility (Kent, et al., 2001). At the final rung, or highest point, of the SST process, the school psychologist conducts a psychological examination, and the labeling process begins (Jensen, 1969; Kent, et. al., 2001). I use this data only to gain a snapshot of when and why each student was referred to special education. I do not delve deeply into the referral process as my focus is student perspective and not teacher perspective. Therefore, I gather a brief synopsis from this data and use it primarily to build the demographical image of each student.

Research Questions

The research questions that guide this study are:

(1) How do Economically Disadvantaged (ED), Black students who have been identified as Learning Disabled (LD) perceive their own dis/ability in school in contrast to their lived reality?

(2) What do ED, Black students who have been identified as LD perceive as a barrier to their own academic success?

Research Design

To understand how economically disadvantaged, Black students respond to being labeled with a learning disability, I interviewed students individually and collectively (Saldaña, 2011; Seidman, 2016). Students took part in five rounds of interviews in addition to a one open-ended-question survey. They began with a one-question survey asking them to reveal something that they wish their teachers knew about their lived reality using words or pictures (Schwarz, 2016). In this initial round, students independently expressed how they want to be viewed by their teachers. This simple activity gave tremendous insight into the inner world of students—particularly students who were not always verbal in the classroom setting (Schwarz, 2016).

Each student was then interviewed individually with a set of 25 semi-structured questions (see Appendix B). This second round of questioning allowed me to get a sense of how each student viewed him or herself as an individual without the input or presence of other students. Ensuring that interviews were semi-structured allowed me as the researcher to ask clarifying questions to explore the meaning of the responses presented (Patton, 2009).

The third round consisted of four focus group sessions. In this round, students came together to engage in a memory walk (see definition of terms) of the third grade—sharing their

collective experiences in a grade level that many educators consider to be pivotal (Simms, 2012).

After this session, I developed three additional rounds of group questioning respectively

categorized by economic status, race, and ability using information from trends evident in the

previous interview sessions. As I collected and interacted with the data my questioning

procedures increased in specifics, however the use of semi-structured questioning continued

through all three rounds (Seidman, 2006).

I was careful not to ask the students "simple" questions such as, "Do you think your

teachers care about you?" or "Do you like your school?" as well as questions that would evoke

canned answers like, "Tell me what a good classroom should look like." I wanted to ask

questions that would move students away from a simple yes or no and encourage them to offer

details when asked "Why?" I also wanted students to move away from saying what they believed

I would have wanted them to hear. This continuous probing influenced the participants to give

more thought to the quality of their school environment. Furthermore, the presence of other

participants offering similar feedback lead students to be more vocal about their needs as they

realized they were not alone.

The following sections detail the setting for my study and the strategies for selecting my

student sample and generating the data needed to address my research questions. The table below

(see Figure 2.1) demonstrates the alignment between my research questions, theoretical

perspective, and data sources.

Research Question	Theoretical Perspective	Data Sources
How do Economically Disadvantaged (ED), Black students who have been identified as Learning Disabled (LD) perceive their own dis/ability in school in contrast to their lived reality?	*Focus:* Disability Studies (DS) ⬇ DisCrit	• Individual Interviews • Focus Groups: -Ability, -Race -Economics
What do ED, Black students who have been identified as LD perceive as a barrier to their own academic success?	*Focus:* Critical Race Theory (CRT) ⬇ DisCrit	• Student Surveys • Individual Interviews • Focus Group: -Memory Walk -Ability -Race

Figure 2.1

Setting

The study was conducted within an elementary school that serves a high population of economically disadvantaged, Black students in a metropolitan area in the southeastern region of the United States. Within the context of this school, 99% of students are Black, 100% of Black students are economically disadvantaged, and 7% of students who are Black and economically disadvantaged are labeled as having a specific learning disability (SLD) (Georgia School Reports, 2017). According to the 2017 school report data, only 22.2% of third grade students at this school were reading at or above grade level—performing better than only 11% of schools in that state. Additionally, the immediate community in which these children reside is facing gentrification as median home prices have increased nearly 70% within the last six years (Powers, 2017).

In the school year that this study was conducted, the school has been selected by the district as a turnaround school that was to be governed in partnership with a Charter Management Organization (CMO) that already had relatively successful charter schools in the

district. As a result, class size was reduced from over 25 students per teacher in one classroom to eight students per teacher with two teachers in one classroom.

Sampling Procedures

To select my sample, I utilized purposive/purposeful sampling to gain an in-depth look at a specific group of individuals. Patton (1990) describes purposeful sampling as "information-rich cases [from] which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research" (p. 169).

I selected six economically disadvantaged, Black students with a learning disability to participate in the study. To identify my participants, I identified students in the fifth grade who had been found eligible for a Specific Learning Disability (SLD) and received 15 or more hours of co-taught or small group instructional services from the special education department daily. Of those students, I then filtered out those who self-identified as Black. Finally, among those students who identified as Black and eligible for SLD, I identified those who are economically disadvantaged based on their eligibility for free or reduced lunch. Once the final group was established, I randomly selected three males and three females who had reached eleven years of age.

Access

The students in this study were selected from the school I was employed at as a special education teacher during the 2017-2018 school year. Permission from the school principal to conduct research within the school was granted after the formal IRB approval process. Due to the age of the intended participants, I offered consent forms to the parents and assent forms to the minors for permission to conduct my research—highlighting their anonymity in my research. I reviewed the content of the research to each student prior to sending home the consent forms.

This allowed the student to introduce the concept of the research to the parent prior to my direct

contact. During the following school day, I reached out to the parents of the selected participants

to share the purpose of my research and ask for their consent.

       Rapport. Rapport had already been established as I had worked with the students directly

or indirectly during the school year. The interviews took place within my classroom during the

time that their classmates were at recess or taking an academic break within their classroom.

Conceptual Framework

       The results of this phenomenological interview study are framed using the DisCrit

framework as it relates to student perspective and counter storytelling. I use this conceptual

framework to explore the dis/abling process that takes place in schools serving economically

disadvantaged, Black students. I believe that it is my duty as an educator to challenge the

concepts and practices that have historically limited, and continue to limit, economically

disadvantaged Black students from maximizing their full potential. Connor (2015) supports this

sentiment with his assertion that special education teachers "must take responsibility and action

to either accept the status quo … or change it" (p. 379). Therefore, while this study may not

single-handedly solve the disproportionality of economically disadvantaged, Black students in

special education, it demonstrates that I am committed to continuously doing my part to

challenge the status quo.

       DisCrit critically examines the intersectionality of race and dis/ability as it relates to

academic expectations and achievement in current social institutions (Connor, 2015). In this

study, I am interested in learning and sharing how economically disadvantaged, Black students

who have been labeled with a learning disability perceive their own ability within the context of

their lived reality. As a qualitative researcher seeking social justice in education, my desire is to

gain a clear understanding of how the students marginalized by systemic ideals respond to their circumstances. My intention as a researcher on this issue is to explore how the lived reality of economically disadvantaged, Black students labeled with a learning disability, might or might not suggest that disability is a construct instituted by those who regard the White, middle-class culture as the gold standard.

Data Collection

I interview students under the themes of economics, race, and ability to understand and develop their individual and collective narratives as it relates to their perceptions of their circumstances and their approach to academics. I seek out trends in the perceptions of the interviewees and what those perceptions reveal about their educational experience. Ultimately, I am interested in understanding how dis/ability has been constructed within the school system, and how that construct has affected the self-actualization process for economically disadvantaged, Black children.

Sample

This study was conducted within an elementary school that serves a high population of economically disadvantaged, Black students in a metropolitan area in the southeastern region of the United States. The school, reported as failing for several consecutive years, was recently taken over by a charter management system in a district turnaround initiative. As a result, class sizes were reduced from a 25:1 student-teacher ratio to an 8:1 student-teacher ratio. The school day was also extended to accommodate additional instruction time—including a reading block with a heavy focus on phonics.

The sample includes four participants averaging 11.5 years of age. All participants have been labeled as having a learning disability. They each identify as Black/African-American and

are eligible for free or reduced lunch based on economic status. Of the 4 participants, 3 were males and one was female; 3 participants—2 boys and 1 girl—were in the fifth grade, while one participant was in the fourth grade.

Due to the age of the participants, a parental consent form was required before they could be interviewed. I distributed a total of six forms to students matching the description presented; only four forms were returned. After attempting to contact the parents of the two children who did not return the forms, I continued with conducting the research on four students—three boys and one girl. Pseudonyms are used to conceal the name of each student, as well as the name of the school and location. Pseudonyms are marked with an asterisk the first time presented.

Instrumentation. Students begin with a one-question, open-answer questionnaire that asks them to explain what they would want their teachers to know about them using words or pictures (Appendix A). Elementary school teacher, Kyle Schwartz (2016), originally used this one question survey to gain a deeper understanding of the lived reality of her students. She found that this quick activity allowed her to gain a more holistic understanding of her students and the effects their reality had on their school experience (Schwartz, 2016). I begin with this non-verbal probing to gain a raw perspective from the student that is not yet affected by the themes can be found from the reflective process that comes out of questioning. I also invite the students to use pictures to offer different avenues for expressing their thoughts on paper. Ultimately, this gives me an organic look at what is most important for these students as it relates to the educators they continuously interact with.

Next, I interview students individually using semi-structured interview questions (Appendix B). The individual interview process allowed me to dive into the unique perspective of the individual student prior to possible influences from the experience of their peers as well as

ensure trustworthiness within each individual student. As with the surveys, the individual

interviews are conducted first to (1) allow me to obtain a more organic perspective of the lived

reality of each student, and (2) generate focus group questions based on trends in responses. I

present a structured series of questions to maintain an organized research process as suggested by

Seidman (2006). However, I also maintain a semi-structured approach that allows me to revise or

breakdown questions as necessary based on participant comprehension and response (Patten,

2009).

Students participated in four focus group sessions. The first session was a memory walk

of the third grade. In this session I asked students a series of questions influenced by their

individual interviews about their third-grade year. I selected third grade as it is a pivotal year

within a child's matriculation through elementary school (Simms, 2012). In my experience as a

K-8 special education teacher, I have found that a significant number of my students with

learning disabilities were referred to special education by, or immediately after, their third-grade

year.

The next three rounds of this research questioned student perception of economic, race,

and ability. The questions for these rounds were influenced by trends discovered in the individual

surveys and interviews, as well as the third-grade memory walk. I opted to formulate questions

after the individual surveys and interviews to reduce personal bias on the part of the researcher.

These data sources allowed me to develop a full picture of each student's personal story both

collectively and as individuals. (See Figure 1.2)

Trustworthiness. I reassured the participants of this study that there are no risks for

participation in this study. All individuals were presented using a pseudonym as anonymity for

the school and students are of the utmost importance. The benefits are intangible as it may bring

awareness to an issue that has been accepted as the norm. The data collected from students was triangulated to help facilitate clarity and non-biased reporting (see Figure 1.1). Students had an opportunity to give a non-verbal response, verbal response, and then engage with their peers.

To ensure that the research is measuring what it is intended to measure (Golafani, 2003), I also took field notes to record student behavior during the interviews. This data source was supplementary to the content I pull from the interviews as I paid attention to voice inflections, student interactions, and body language.

Data Analysis

There is no qualitative algorithm or formula that adds up the words and calculates their mean. But there are methods for synthesizing the collective, not to arrive at a reduced answer but to move toward *consolidated meaning*. That meaning may take the symbolic form of a category, theme, concept, or assertion, or set in motion a new line of investigation, interpretive thought, or the crystallization of a new theory.

(Saldana, 2016).

Research Flow

A

B

Individual
Interview
Responses

Survey
Results

Student
Survey
Analysis

Individual
Interviews
Responses

Focus
Group 1
Responses

Focus Group 1 Questions:
3rd Grade Memory Walk

Focus Groups (2-4) Questions:
Economics, Race, and Ability

C

Individual
Interviews

Survey
Results

Focus
Groups 1 -
4

**Student
Narratives**
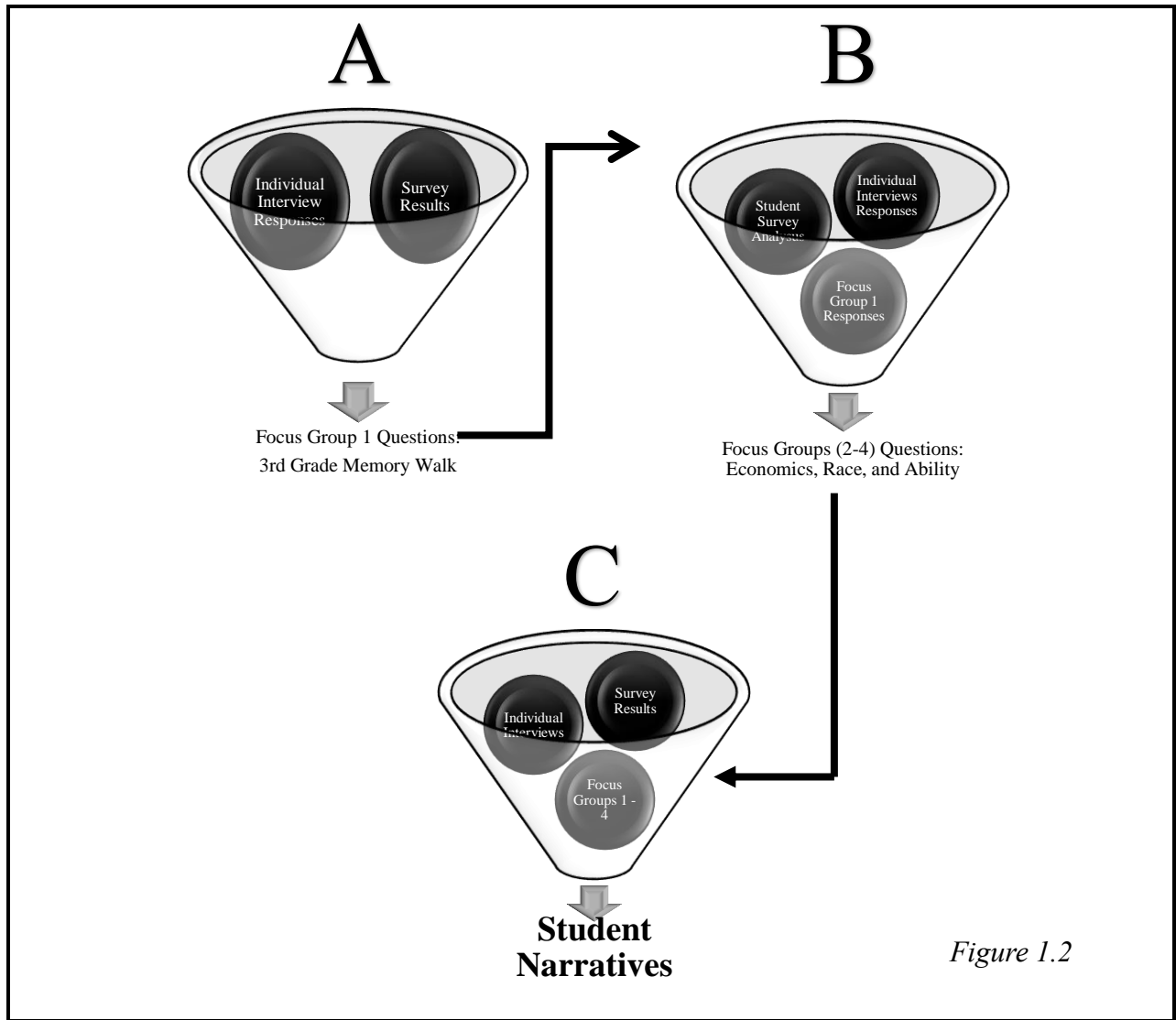
Figure 1.2

I analyzed my data from the surveys and interviews through a transcription and coding process. Each individual and focus group interview was digitally recorded and transcribed using online transcription software—oTranscribe.com. To support my original research questions, I look for trends that address: (A) How does a student's lived reality support or reject their learning disability label? (B) How do economically disadvantaged (ED), Black students view

their own performance as learners? (C) What do student's recognize as a barrier to their own

success?

To locate these trends, I employed a coding process. Coding, or code, is defined as an

interpretive process that requires the researcher to analyze student responses by placing them

into unique categories (Saldana, 2016). I coded the student surveys using a method called

eclectic coding to develop an organic interpretation of what each student deems important for

their teacher to know and understand about them (Saldana, 2016). These codes serve as

preliminary codes to be finalized through a codifying—coding and recoding—process. Using

that same coding method, I decoded student responses to their individual interviews by jotting

down my first impression and encoding them into one to three-word phrases (Saldana, 2016). I

use this method to gain insight on what each student deems as important in their world prior to

looking for their more specific understanding of economic status, race, and ability; thus,

establishing preliminary codes that is then used to develop the questions for the first focus

group—Third-Grade Memory Walk.

When coding the student responses after the memory walk, I looked for patterns across

student responses as it relates to their economic status, race, and ability. Once I have established

a series of patterns in student responses that describe their third-grade experience, I returned to

the student surveys and individual interviews to review the data with the codes that emerged

from the memory walk; thus, codifying the data into categories to formulate the next three

rounds of questioning (Saldana, 2016). Codifying, allowed me to meticulously analyze and

reflect on conversations and observations as I construct meaning out of the human experience

(Saldana, 2016).

After completing the focus group sessions on economics, race, and ability, I transcribed and code the data using eclectic coding to record my initial responses. I then recoded the data using in Vivo coding (Saldana, 2016), which offers a more focused approach to coding and categorizing information. After I arrived at a final set of codes through the codifying process illustrated in Figure 1.2, I began to construct their student narratives through the lens of DisCrit (Saldana, 2016).

Throughout this process I cross referenced this data with the field notes taken during the interviews as necessary. My field notes focused on voice inflections, student interactions and body language throughout the interview. Within this data, I sought knowledge that addressed the societal issues in education that are often debated by individuals who are unaffected by the circumstances of these students. As I explored how these students defined their own dis/ability in contrast to their lived reality, I sought a new approach for fostering the abilities of these students as opposed to forcing them to adopt a standard that devalued the knowledge they owned.

Confidentiality. The confidentiality of the location and participants are of the utmost importance. All interview rounds were electronically recorded and later transcribed. I requested each student's consent to record the interviews while we individually discussed their assent forms. I reminded students that I was recording their responses before each interview. Transcripts were edited for identifiable information. The school is referred to by the relative location as opposed to its name and district of affiliation. All participants, students, and teachers alike, are referred to using a pseudonym. All data is stored within a password-protected, electronic data cloud on a password-protected computer.

Limitations

There are several limitations that must be considered in the process of completing this study. At its core, qualitative research, like all research, is considered subjective. As the accounts of the participants are personal and left to the interpretation of researcher, misinterpretations, as well as multiple interpretations, are possible. One must always consider that a researcher, while inquisitive and dynamic, may be limited by his or her own experiences and understandings (Stake, 2010).

This study was conducted at my local school toward the end of the school year. Students appeared to feel comfortable being completely open and honest about their experience and what it means to them. At the same, I noticed they were occasionally hesitant to share their true feelings in fear of upsetting their other teachers. This may affect the quality of data obtained and/or threaten the objectivity.

The experiences of these students are intended to give voice to their unique classroom experiences as well as bring awareness to the student's perspective. These experiences, nonetheless, do not entirely define the experiences of *all* ED, Black students labeled with a LD, nor does it assume to be the solitary solution for combating the issue of disproportionality.

Positionality

When I consider my positionality within this topic, my passion for social justice in Urban Education is my most significant subjectivity. Over the years, I have developed emotional ties to plight of underrepresented students—namely African American and Caribbean American. I grew up in a largely diverse, yet highly minoritized, community in Northern New Jersey and noticed disproportionality very early on. Throughout my P-12 career, I experienced constant microaggressions as a student who was constantly described as "the smart Black girl." My being

'smart' was seldom discussed by educators in isolation to my race or even in isolation from my

economic status as the child of a single parent. This suggested that the presumption of my ability

was often automatically lessened due to my race and economic status (Torres, Driscoll, &

Burrow, 2010).

As a child, I was not fully aware of these issues. I often blamed myself for

microaggressions that I did not understand at the time. Quite frankly, I accepted the role that

individuals who lived outside of my personal life experiences constructed for me. For example,

in the fourth grade, my teacher refused to refer me to the gifted program. I was the only Black

student in the group of high achievers, one of two Black students in the class, and the only Black

female. My teacher's rationale was, I had an 'attitude' problem and held grudges too long. To

teach me a lesson, she stated during a parent-teacher conference, she referred my entire group of

friends—many of whom I performed better than—and excluded me.

I was admitted to the gifted education program three years later in the seventh grade.

However, after one year of minimal instruction in an overcrowded urban middle school in

Elizabeth, NJ, I had fallen behind my peers. I left the district and was admitted to the gifted

program at a middle school in Hillside, NJ—a more stable and suburban community in

comparison to Elizabeth. I struggled a great deal to keep up with the students in the program.

Math, which was once my favorite subject, was particularly hard as I had not received the same

level of math instruction the previous school year. At the end of the school year, I was removed

from the program and assigned regular classes for my 8th grade year. Not surprisingly, the

courses I was assigned during that 8th grade year, were absurdly easy. Not only did I easily

graduate from middle school within the top 5% of my class, but I immediately recognized that

someone on the outside of my life had dictated my educational experience without my input. I

was never given the opportunity to catch up with my peers within the gifted setting. Needless to say, instead of giving me the tools I needed to be successful, the expectations were simply lowered.

When I reflect on my fourth-grade teacher and the domino effect of being denied admission to the gifted program for non-academic reasons, I recognize how easily her individual perception of me had a four-year effect on my education and could have been detrimental to my overall educational experience. Fortunately, I had a mother who pushed me relentlessly and pushed the educators in my care to honor my abilities. I can even recall her meeting with my teachers as early as second-grade after a comment was made to the class that I would make a great secretary because I was so good with computers. My mother, who was a secretary at the time, addressed my teacher about her comment in a private conference and informed me that being a secretary was not an option. Although the details this conversation and the conversation my mother would have two years later about the denial to refer me to the gifted program in fourth grade are unknown, I recognize that she never stopped fighting to ensure I had a quality education.

The issue I believe my fourth-grade teacher may have had with me is, I was a nine-year-old, economically disadvantaged, Caribbean-American female, who responded to every microaggression that I deemed unfair and held on to it until it was corrected. I can remember that teacher being skeptical one day of a story I wrote for homework. I remember being angry, embarrassed, and confused from her doubt in me for a while. This was perceived as aggressive grudge holding behavior, simplified as a character flaw, and dismissed. In my reflection, I recognize that I was strong-willed in what I believed was right. I wanted to be heard and respected for my talents. I wrote the story and I wanted her to be proud of me in the same way

she had been proud of the other students. I was one of only two Black children in the class and I was hurt that she did not have the same faith in me as she had in the others. Little did I know it would be the beginning of my passion for social justice in education. That fourth-grade teacher's personal perception of me overshadowed my true academic ability. She simply could not believe that a child like me could be highly intelligent. Her response to that perception was to restrict my access to a challenging, higher quality education until I met the gold standard and accepted who *she* wanted me to be.

This experience, as well as numerous others I would encounter up throughout my college years led me to question the structure of education and how it functions to perpetuate or address issues with race and achievement. I recognize that this personal connection has the potential to affect the lens I use to analyze student responses. Therefore, as I reported my findings, I made sure that I accurately represented the actual voice and experience of the participants without infusing my own perspective.

My experiences add to my lens as an educator and researcher. As an educator in the field of special education, I have witnessed the dismissal of the individual culture of economically, Black students by teachers of all races and background. I watched as students were labeled as having a learning disability but flourished with teachers who created engaging classroom experiences. This suggested to me that economically disadvantaged, Black students were not actually placed in Special Education because of a true deficit, but because of the perception of educators who appeared systemically trained to regard White, middle class standards as the gold standard.

Summary

The addition of student voice to the body of literature surrounding disproportionality offers educators a new perspective on the achievement of economically disadvantaged, Black students. Oyler (2011) reminds us that classrooms are sites of cultural and social reproduction and educators bear the responsibility of perpetuating the status quo or challenging it by "teaching tolerance" and "appreciating diversity" (p. 148). Many "teachers' own life experiences have not adequately prepared them for the immense challenges inherent in a social justice-oriented approach to early childhood and childhood education" (Oyler, 2011, p. 147). This suggests that a fresh look at the inequities that plague our education system is in order.

Bringing differences to the forefront is a difficult process. Dimitriadis (2008) believes that educators must be challenged to consider how oppression works in systemic ways. Unfortunately, most individuals are more comfortable avoiding the conversation of race and class and the systemic injustices that restrict the achievement of diverse subgroups (Alexander, 2010; Howard, 2010). This attitude, however, has severely limited districts from properly addressing the gap in achievement for their economically disadvantaged, Black population and has resulted in the oversaturation of ED, Black students labeled with a learning disability. It is my hope that this study addresses the status quo in education by offering a vantage point that has historically been muted.

The following two chapters discuss the results and analysis of the data collection process. In chapter 4, I report the findings of my research and the stories that were constructed from the series of interviews. This chapter includes the individual voice of each child as well as their collective stories. In chapter 5, I further analyze the data from my research and offer suggestions

for future considerations. I also use this chapter to reflect on the impact of my research as it

relates to effective teaching and for economically disadvantaged, Black students.

Chapter 4: Voices from the Margin

At the very heart of what it means to be human is the ability of people to symbolize their

experience through language.

(Seidman, 2006, p. 8)

The following chapter describes the results from the individual student interviews and

focus groups. Because the purpose of my study is to understand how economically

disadvantaged, Black students *respond* to being categorized as learning disabled, I discuss the

themes I identified from patterns found within the responses of the participants and included

them in the grid below (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This approach to thematic analysis allow me to

stretch beyond simply "giving voice" to individual participants as a researcher and identify

patterns that disrupt the hegemonic narratives that has negatively defined this community of

economically disadvantaged, Black children for far too long (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Fine &

Weiss, 1996; McKay, 2010; Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000;) The following research questions

guide this study:

   (1) How do Economically Disadvantaged (ED), Black students who have been

   identified as Learning Disabled (LD) perceive their own dis/ability in school in contrast

   to their lived reality?

   (2) What do ED, Black students who have been identified as LD perceive as a barrier to

   their own academic success?

Research Question	Theoretical Perspective	Data Findings
How do Economically Disadvantaged (ED), Black students who have been identified as Learning Disabled (LD) perceive their own dis/ability in school in contrast to their lived reality?	*Focus:* **Disability Studies (DS)** ⬇ **DisCrit**	• Students regard themselves as highly capable, but in need of assistance/support at times. • Home training is school training. Your home life prepares you for school life. • Students view dis/ability as a fixed condition. Even when frustrated, students do not view their personal classroom difficulties as a fixed condition. • Students were all referred to Special Education due to concerns with phonemic awareness.
What do ED, Black students who have been identified as LD perceive as a barrier to their own academic success?	**Focus: Critical Race Theory (CRT)** ⬇ **DisCrit**	• Students feel they are told and not shown new concepts. • Classes are overcrowded, making it difficult for students to focus and receive direct support. • Some teachers struggle with classroom management—impeding instructional time and the ability to focus. • Students are concerned about being forced to assimilate to White, middle class culture and are resistant to concepts that challenge their identity.

In each section I begin with an introduction of each participating student, their demographical information, and the contributing factors for their referral to special education. I follow this brief presentation of their biographical information with five major themes that I have identified within their responses that report their experiences as economically disadvantaged, Black students labeled with a learning disability (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Patton, 2002). Because the themes presented are situated in the theoretic framework of Critical Theory—specifically

Dis/ability Critical Race Theory (DisCrit), I particularly focus on the themes that challenge the elements of the status quo that suggest the labeling of economically disadvantaged, Black students as dis/abled is "common sense" (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Mendoza, Paguyo & Guiterrez, 2016; Skiba et al., 2008).

The four students in this study presented themselves as children who enjoyed learning, revered their families, and desired to be loved—basic human needs that do not require any form of socialization to possess (Etzioni, 1968). While they recognized that there were times that their school work was difficult and they needed assistance, they never saw themselves as being dis/abled (Solis & Conner, 2006). During the interviews, it quickly became clear that these students were enduring a lifetime of being measured for their social experiences—limited in the context of the larger society—as opposed to their actual intellectual ability (Anderson, 2007; Dunn, 1968; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Lam, 2014). To define their personhood in a manner that confronts the long history of defining Blacks in America as lesser beings (Alexander, 2010), it was important for me to offer a brief description of who they are as individuals before giving meaning to their voices in my presentation of the data (Fine & Weiss, 1996).

Tasha

Tasha* is a 11-year-old, Black girl in the fifth grade who enjoys wearing bright colors, costume jewelry, and lip gloss as many of the other young ladies in her class. She lives in a single parent home with her maternal siblings and endeavors to be a chef when she grows up. Tasha is a girl with an inclination towards building fun, meaningful relationships with her peers, teachers, and family members. Her sense of humor, diplomacy skills, and belief in the "Golden Rule" allows her to make friends easily.

Tasha was initially referred to special education just a few weeks shy of her fifth birthday. According to the referral paperwork, teachers reported that Tasha was experiencing difficulties in phonemic awareness and phonological processing. She was found eligible for a Significant Developmental Delay (SDD) and consequently placed in Special Education. Tasha maintained this status as a student with a disability from Pre-Kindergarten into her third-grade year. When re-evaluated at the end of her fourth-grade year, she was deemed still eligible for special education services under the Specific Learning Disability (SLD) program; thus maintaining her dis/ability status through the remainder of her elementary school years.

Kevin

Kevin is an 11-year old, Black boy in the fifth grade who loves basketball. He calls himself, "The Cool Guy." Kevin, who has been playing basketball competitively since he was a toddler, endeavors to be a basketball player when he grows up. He resides in a two-parent household and is the youngest of four—his three older siblings being female. When describing his parents, Kevin very clearly states, "my parents don't play" to explain that they have high expectations of his academic and behavioral performance in school.

Kevin was initially placed in special education during the second semester of his fourth-grade year. His third-grade teacher began the referral process, citing concerns with phonological processing, that would later find him eligible for special education services through the Specific Learning Disability (SLD) *and* Speech and Language Impairment (SLI) programs.

Justin

Justin* is an active, affectionate 12-year-old, Black boy in the fifth grade who loves to talk. As an only child to a single parent, his mother pushed for him to receive a male teacher at the start of the school year as she reported that he had no positive male role model in his life.

After three classroom changes, Justin was finally assigned to a Black, male educator after the first month of school.

Justin was referred to special education at the end of his fourth-grade year after transferring to the current school. He was originally referred to the Student Support Services (SST) after being retained in the fourth grade. According to his records, Justin was labeled with a specific learning disability (SLD) for deficits in phonemic awareness and math digit fluency. His teachers described his progress as inconsistent and stated that he had a difficult time staying focused.

Nate

Nate* is a helpful, affectionate 11-year-old, Black boy who exemplifies the term, "Gentle Giant." He stands at 5' 9" and is only in the fourth grade. Nate is mainly cared for by his grandmother among several other siblings and family members in what appears to be a crowded home. He is often tasked with caring for younger children in the home as he as deemed the more responsible child of the group. While his parents are present in his life, it appears that Nate reveres his grandmother as the person who truly cares for him.

Nate confidently describes himself as a smart student. Teachers often describe him as the student who wants to participate even if he gets every question wrong or reads a passage painstakingly slow. He is the kind of student who values learning and is not easily embarrassed when he is confident that he is trying his best. He was referred to special education during the second semester of his third-grade year after being retained for the second time. As with the previous students, Nate's teachers cited difficulties in reading fluency and reading comprehension to justify the need for a referral to special education.

In the following sections, I present five themes that that I identified from the interview process. These themes include (1) Home Training is School Training—the early lessons of self-protection, (2) I Don't Wanna Talk White—the desire to maintain and honor one's cultural identity throughout the learning process, (3) Show Me, Don't Just Tell Me—the frustration of undergoing an assign and assess process without proper demonstration and support, (4) I Can't Focus—the results of subpar human resources and large class sizes, and (5) This a Hood School—the cultural and linguistic variances that cause educators to suggest a lack of phonemic awareness and begin the special education referral process.

I found that these students, as individuals and as representatives of the larger community, had specific needs that were not being met while they were hurriedly placed in special education. The school system responded to the "needs" of these students (or desires of their teachers) by labeling these students as dis/abled, a process that arguably exempts the teacher, the school, and the system of the responsibility of ensuring that child's success and places blame on the child by suggesting that something is "wrong."

"Home Training *is* School Training"

I identified that among the most important things to the students interviewed were their relationships with family and friends *and* the learning experiences that came out of those interactions. When asked to juxtapose home life with school life, Tasha shared:

> *Home training is school training too… The same home training you use at home is the same home training you use at school.*

Kevin, a student who holds himself to high standards due to the expectations of his working-class parents, followed Tasha's statement with:

You have to learn how to become a person before you come to school… like... you have to learn home training... and how to... treat people right.

These statements were clear confirmations that students bring their home experiences directly into the classroom in a very innocent and matter-of-fact manner—thus begging the question of whose culture, or home-training, is considered valuable (Yosso, 2005).

In Nate's response to these questions, he stated:

It's like, my mom, cause she teach me a lot of things... but it's like stuff like if I try to get kidnapped or something like that... it's not... [shrugs] sometimes it's educational stuff like Math, homework, stuff like that. But stuff outside of school....[voice trails as the student shook his head..]

It is important to note that the school in which the study was conducted sat adjacent to three known drug houses. Rampant drug abuse, crime, and prostitution have continued to riddle the community for decades. Throughout the day there is often a crowd of prostitutes, drug addicts, and drug dealers within a few feet of the school. The art room, for example, looks directly into the active yard of a drug dealer's home, while the playground is often littered with condoms, trash, and drug paraphernalia on Monday mornings.

The students shared that home was a place where survival skills were learned for them to function independently within the community outside of their home. This suggested that the cultural experiences, that these students brought to school was situated in a culture that reflected their immediate needs based on the community they lived in, yet devalued based on its differences from the White, middle class culture (Darling-Hammond, 2009; Ford & Russo, 2016; Hull, et al., 2014; Paris & Alim, 2015; Yosso, 2005).

I noted a visible shift in body language for each student when we began discussing the condition of their community. The students unanimously agreed that the condition of their community and consequently their school, negatively affected the quality of their education. Each student mentioned the culture of violence as the most pressing issue in their community and the profound need for safety. Nate shook his head with a look of disappointment as he discussed the theft of his friend's bicycle by older children in the neighborhood, while Kevin discussed the issue of car thefts in the neighborhood by children slightly older than the bike thieves. At one point, Kevin even suggested that it was the quality of the neighborhood that "messes up kids' head" and causes them to engage in criminal behavior.

Both Justin and Tasha discussed the more intense gun violence and the need to constantly protect oneself within school and within the community. Tasha referred to the school going on lockdown often due to violence in and around the school. Similarly, Nate discussed his concern for the Pre-K and Kindergarten classes—where some his younger siblings and family members were—going on lockdown without having a door to lock and protect them as in his own classroom drills. Nate's demeanor as he discussed his concerns suggested that his primary concern for the Pre-K and Kindergarten classes was safety.

The need to survive, consequently, outpaces the need to excel academically. In a song written by popular Hip Hop Artist, Meek Mill, depicting life in an economically disadvantaged, minoritized community, he states, "Mama taught you how to fight, fight before she taught you how to write, right" (Williams, et al., 2018). Here we can argue that the early lessons of many economically disadvantaged students—particularly those is high crime communities—are rooted in survival as opposed to academia. This challenges the dominant ideology that students who are economically disadvantaged are inherently disabled. This is a *response* to their immediate

environmental need and not an assumed indication of an intellectual inferiority (Dunn, 1968; Connor, 2008; Skiba et al., 2008; Yosso, 2005). Therefore, although educators may find that children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds possess one-third the vocabulary than that of children of middle income families we can argue that there is a different, unmeasured body of knowledge, or schema, that is possessed by these students that should not point toward a lack of ability, but instead, a need to change how we measure academic achievement or success (Darling-Hammond, 2009; Yosso, 2005). Building upon that knowledge as opposed to devaluing it has the potential to challenge the way economically disadvantaged, Black children are viewed and therefore treated, in the school system.

Considering the dire need for survival in the community these students reside in, equity within the school community is a major concern. It is here that one can see the intersection of race and economics as the deciding factors on what a school deserves. When asked about making changes in their community, Justin and Tasha stated that the main aspect they would change is their school—the center of their community. They both cited the issue with rodents and the overall cleanliness of the school. The stage in the school auditorium was a breeding ground for rodents and other pests as it had been used for storage over the years. The auditorium itself, however, was still used for dismissal, indoor recess, and other activities as needed—meaning children were still actively playing around the infested area. Justin, with his face twisted in utter disgust, candidly described the condition of the auditorium where they were to have their fifth-grade graduation:

> *I would change the school… because it got rats in here... ...they gotta clean all that dirty*
>
> *clothes, messy clothes, pissy clothes, rats down there... they gotta clean like… everything.*

Cause when we be in the auditorium, we saw a rat... and you know that little thing what

the cheese be in? We saw one of them in the auditorium on the stage.

Tasha, nodding as Justin spoke, supported his claim, and shared that an animal treatment

program was needed. She then shared that many people in the community refer to the school as a

"hood school." When asked for clarification, she shared:

A hood school is a school that doesn't teach you and just lets you have fun.

These vantage points suggest that the school environment in which these children must be

educated mirrors the community that they must take a defensive stance against in order to

survive. Therefore, if one resides in a community that they must remain hyper vigilant in, and the

school—which is arguably the center of that community—also does not provide a sense of

security, it is unfair to expect that individual to completely ignore his immediate needs and

prioritize a White, middle class oriented curriculum.

"I Don't Wanna Talk White"

The human need, or desire, for one to maintain their identity (Etzioni, 1968) as opposed

to conform to another does not equate to an inability to succeed. However, in a system that

overvalues Whiteness and undervalues Blackness, the act of nonconformity on the part of non-

Whites is viewed as an act of rebellion and suggests yet another reason to call upon the

dis/abling process (Alexander, 2010; Alim & Paris, 2017; Connor, Ferri, & Annamma, 2016;

Howard, 2010). One concept that is under-researched, however, is the hidden fear of White

culture as a hegemonic, dominant force that elicits an immediate posture of defense in Black

communities (Alexander, 2010; McGinniss & Smitherman, 1978). Therefore, the presence of

White culture is arguably viewed as a threat to Black culture (Alexander, 2010; Anderson, 2010).

During the interviews, the students shared their distrust for White Americans. When asked about their sentiments towards race, Justin responded:

> *...If somebody else call me Black and they Black and they know they Black... *shrugs**
>
> *but if it's a person that's White, they call me Black, they being racist...*

Later in the interview Justin revisits these sentiments with the statement:

> *... White people they might act up at up at the same things. They might... a Black person, if a*
>
> *Black person fight right... The White people are gonna act like the same person doing stuff...*
>
> *a White person and a Black person fight right and then the White person is gonna try to jump*
>
> *in and help his friend...*
>
> *...they gonna go to detention... but they gonna believe it's the Black person.*

As Black students, all participants reported that they were proud to be Black and did not immediately attribute their race to their academic success or the overall success of their school. Kevin shared his main concern of "talking White"—a phrase that is often used within the Black community to point out those who have conformed to White culture:

> *I feel happy that I'm Black because, people already making issues that White people are*
>
> *racist, already and plus... I don't wanna talk like White people...*
>
> *... Like, they talk like.. kinda babyish..*

Before Kevin could elaborate on what "babyish" meant to him, Tasha stated:

> *They be talking crazy... because... any words that come out of their mouth is just nothing.*
>
> *Some White people.. Some not. Some don't like racism.*

The question of race immediately brought the concept of racism to the forefront of each student's mind. As they spoke, they often shook their heads "no" as if they were preparing themselves to refuse something they did not want. Kevin and Tasha agreed that they felt as though they do not really understand what most White people are saying; thus, exposing a

defensive concern—almost fear—about adopting the linguistic patterns of White Americans. This linguistic-cultural conflict emerges as a form of resistance as Black students begin to feel resentful at the devaluation of their identity (Alim & Paris, 2017; McGinnis & Smitherman, 1978).

When Nate spoke of his identity as a Black male, he spoke in a proud tone that demonstrated his pride in being Black. Even in his pride, however he was clear about the source of his distrust of Whites and admitted to being nervous around White people because of the way they looked at him. He stated:

> *...White people try to steal your money. My mom.. she be saying... (laughs) you do not wanna hear my momma talk about White people. But my grandma... she keep thinking that... White people like Donald Trump gonna send all the Black people to different countries... and stuff like that.. and cause my grandma... she... cause it is nice houses in our neighborhood that's just now getting built.. like real big nice houses but it says no…. it says at the bottom it's real small... it says... no black people can buy!*

Based on his limited experiences as well as the views of his grandmother, Nate viewed White people as untrustworthy people that he needed to defend himself against. He called them thieves and bullies—even going as far as saying that White teachers do not care about Black students. When describing the process of gentrification of his neighborhood, he believed that Black people were not allowed to purchase the new homes that were being built in his neighborhood—causing an additional layer of distrust for White people.

As students who had only attended schools with a high population of economically disadvantaged, Black students like themselves, I recognized that this setting was also their comfort zone. The students appeared to adopt a sense of belonging that they felt could not be

achieved easily in a more integrated setting. When asked if they would want to attend a school

with more White children, Tasha responded:

> *I think it would be a horrible experience because they probably like... if we like different*
>
> *colors... some people still think we racist to... White people. But I think it would be too*
>
> *much pressure on you like other schools, like this school, they don't put pressure. They*
>
> *help you take your time... but other schools they just like put pressure on you like...*
>
> *[Bangs Table as she talks] HURRY UP! DO THIS! DO THAT! GET IT RIGHT!...*
>
> *something like that...*

Due to their young ages, they had not yet developed their own critical perspective of race

as much of their understanding of White culture came from television and/or the perspective of

their parents—thus, creating a strong us vs. them mentality. This mentality, however, appeared to

make them uncomfortable with the thought of 'dealing' with White Americans and how they

may be perceived by Whites as the aggressor in disciplinary situations, the slow – paced worker

in academic situations, and simply unwanted in the community.

Therefore, the active resistance towards White culture as a means to honor and maintain

one's own identity has been grossly misconstrued as a deficit that required 'fixing.' The voices of

these 11-12-year-old participants demonstrate they are proud of who they are as Black

Americans and do not feel the need to adopt another culture to be successful. However, the

constant devaluation of Black culture and distrust of White Americans has led these students to

develop feelings of fear and resentment towards any resemblance of White culture (McGinnis &

Smitherton, 1978; Nieto & Bode, 2007). This devaluation of culture has led many of these

students to be viewed as deficient and falsely characterized as dis/abled before even entering

grade school (Darling-Hammond, 2009; Ford & Russo, 2016; Hull, et al., 2014; Nieto & Bode, 2007; Paris & Alim, 2015; Yosso, 2005).

"*Show Me*, Don't Just Tell Me"

All four students were not able to define the term disability, yet the paperwork that had been following them throughout a significant part of their elementary years boldly labeled them as dis/abled children. It forces one to question how this system can "diagnose" or label a child dis/abled without letting him or her know what that means for them and their education.

Each student defined disability as something that could not be controlled. They described a disabled person as "someone who can't do what everyone else can." When asked to provide examples, Nate mentioned his non-verbal Autistic cousin, while Tasha referenced a person she saw on TV with a Traumatic Brain Injury who had to relearn how to live:

> *Uhm like, so say for instance, if uhm...anybody... imagine that person and they have like... uhm... had like an injury... and they like messed up they brain or something... and we have to reset.. they have to over think things like this girl... she was on the news and she had got hit in the head by her brother with a bat... a metal bat... they was playing inside baseball and had hit head and it messed up her brain so she had to rethink... uhm relearn everything...*

When considering herself, Tasha went on to identify her asthma, allergies, and occasional breakouts on her face as a disability since she felt it was something she had no control over as with the young lady she described above:

> *Yea, I got asthma.. Me and Kevin got asthma. And when we in the uhm... in the first or second weeks, we have the same issues. I have allergies, asthma, and breakouts.*

When asked specifically about learning disabilities, all students agreed that it is a student who may need "help", however they did not immediately identify themselves as students with disabilities. After some discussion, however, Justin admitted to needing help often and considered that he may have a dis/ability. Tasha also shared that she that she occasionally needs assistance with understanding concepts in class and even among conversations with her friends. However, she did not see this as a dis/ability. She appeared to view this as a basic need for help as any other student in her class.

Kevin and Nate also did not identify as having a learning disability and struggled to define it for themselves.

A learning disability? Like... do it have something that mean with learning? So... learning

plays in basketball... I think I can learn plays more... like I said doing it over again and I

could just keep getting it cause when I do it... it be easy... in the game...

For Kevin, he referenced basketball as a learning experience that is made complete by consistent repetition. He applied his experience as a basketball player to helping him to develop his desire to "push through," and meet his parents' expectations. With Nate, he believed that once class work was completed and teacher directions were followed, school was actually easy.

To further understand how the participants responded to needing assistance in academic and non-academic tasks, I asked each student to discuss the variances between learning experiences at home and learning experiences at school. One word that came up for each student regarding learning at home was *show*. Each student expressed that when learning something new at home, they were "shown" as opposed to "taught." Nate very poignantly stated:

At home they walk it through... like my mom she walked me through the stuff like... she

just don't be like (mimics teacher in high pitched tone) "oh... let me write this little

> *problem on the board and let you copy that." She don't do that. My momma, she like she'll stand there for a minute and watch you do it. So then when I do it, I just get better at it... Then she'll be like "Oh Okay, You got it!" But at school, they… Mr. Harris*, he'll like just write it on the thing and then give you one problem and then think that you 'posed to learn it by yourself.*

The other three students maintained a similar sentiment. When asked about learning things at home, they consistently stated that someone—family member or coach—was present to *show* them an example of what and how to work on what they were learning. In addition to Nate's experience with his mother, Tasha's mother *showed* her how to cook, Justin's cousin *showed* him how to log into his new games, and Kevin's coach *showed* him new plays. Not only was each participant shown how to do something new, but the individual—or teacher—present ensured that they closely monitored the process of each student and offered them the necessary feedback and accolades in the process. This allowed each student to experience success in areas they once needed assistance in.

It is important to note here that the need for assistance does not equate to inability. Requesting or receiving assistance on an academic or non-academic task should not determine a child's aptitude; yet in economically disadvantaged, Black communities it does (Artiles, 1998; Crane, 2016; Klassen, 2010; Shifrer, Muller & Callahan, 2011; Trent, Artiles & Englert, 1998). The systemic approach that the American school system has taken to children needing assistance in what is assumed to be common knowledge has erroneously suggested that extra help = disability (Proctor, Graves, & Esch, 2012; Shifrer, Muller, & Callahan, 2011). This exonerates teachers, administrators, and systems from examining the limitations to providing quality learning experiences that not only ensure that student needs are met when needed, but question

whether or not students are able to connect or relate to the information and the examples used to teach new concepts.

"I Can't Focus!"

In the academic setting, the students appeared keenly aware of what is needed to be successful; they recognized that they may need help at times but did not identify with being categorized as disabled. These students strongly valued the opportunity to receive individualized or small group support from their teachers when necessary. Nate and Justin consistently described their work as easy if they were able to get help from the teacher. Justin, however, exclaimed that when he did not grasp a concept in class and could not get the help he needed, he instantly wanted to escape— specifically go home and go to sleep. They each shared that when they get frustrated they expect support and assistance from their teacher. However due to factors such as class size or issues with classroom management, help was not always readily available. This, students admit, increased frustration which included shutting down and becoming resistant to any further learning:

> *Justin: Then I don't get it... I just wanna go to sleep and go home...*
>
> *Nate: I'll say... Oh my God! and Can you help me? and I give up!*

This surge in frustration erroneously assumes a lack of ability, as opposed to demonstrating a need for assistance or quality instruction (Crane, 2016; Klassen, 2010).

Each participant noted that class size was an obstacle in their third-grade year—a year where 3 of 4 of the participants were considered for special education. Nate, who was also retained in the third grade, noted that his class was comprised of approximately 23 students.

> *Nate: It was a whoooole.... We had.. We had.. 23 students.*

Kevin: We had a lot of kids!

Justin: A lot of kids!

Justin: Everybody was being so bad!!...

Justin: ...I couldn't focus, cause you couldn't understand the work and everybody kept

laughing and stuff...

When asked to compare his third-year classroom ratio of 23 to 1 to his current general

education classroom model of 8 to 1, he shared that is was difficult to focus in third grade due to

distractions by other students. Now, as a member of a general education classroom with an 8 to 1

ratio, Nate finds it easier to focus. He states:

[In third grade], you couldn't focus because it would be kids trying to make you laugh...

but in this class, you only focus on one side and on the other side, they're doing their

work... so you can't see what they doing and you can stay focused...

Justin supported this statement by sharing his inability to focus during class—particularly when

everyone was laughing. He described his fellow classmates as "bad" for making others laugh

during instruction. Kevin also agreed that the smaller class sizes allowed him to focus more in

class than he could in the third grade. The realization that all three students were aware that class

size was a hindrance to their ability to focus and learn efficiently, is notable. It demonstrates the

existence of an external force that inhibits these students from reaching their full academic

potential that again equates to a need for an examination of the system and not the lack of ability.

Throughout the interview, it was evident that the behavior was also a major concern for

the participants as it also impeded their ability to focus. They seemed to be clear on the concept

that some teachers are better at classroom management than others. This was evident in their

individual interviews as well as the focus group. The students recognized that negative behavior

that included classroom disruption was a hindrance to classroom success—it prevented them from being able to focus as well as get the support of the teacher needed. As students already needing additional help to acquire certain academic concepts, this appeared to put the students in the mindset of wanting a quick escape—in Justin's words, "I just wanna go home and go to sleep." The sentiment of the students under this theme confirms that schools with a high population of ED, Black students are more susceptible to less experienced, less qualified teachers who have been tasked with boosting academic achievement in these schools with little to no training or connection to the population they are working with (Cavendish, Artiles, & Harry, 2014; Dixson & Rosseau, 2005).

"This a Hood School"

> *A hood school.... A hood school is a school that doesn't teach you and just let you have fun…*

A hood school, as Tasha defined, is a school that neglects academics and encourages apathy. Therefore, without a true measure for students who differ from White, middle class culture, it becomes permissible to regard them as failures and dis/regard them altogether. This equates to even less qualified instructors, less access to resources, and isolation from peers. Tasha even shared that if she were to attend a majority White school, she would be uncomfortable because of the pressure that would be put on her to "get it right." This vantage point echoes the lowered expectations that have been set for economically disadvantaged, Black children that indirectly speaks to their worth and value. Consequently, many economically disadvantaged, Black children begin to internalize this oppression; thus making it extraordinarily difficult for this group of children to feel like they can "get it right."

The young men mentioned supported this sentiment with their discussion of the unprofessional educators that they felt handled students apathetically. Nate spoke of one teacher from his third-grade year who would "jone", or make fun of, students often. As he told the story, Nate's body language suggested that he was uncomfortable with the teacher poking fun at students:

> *She used to like, have competitions, she used to have like who got the best Jordan outfit and stuff... we used to play a lot of games with her and stuff..*
> *She like.. she used to jone on kids.*
> *Serious jone... Like Dennis*... she used to be like [shakes head]*
> *It was just mean.. she would be like.... he would be sleep and she'd be like "Big Boy wake up" and then it be... she'd be like... something.. he slobbing or something... and then she'd jone him…*

I found this response to be alarming, yet went along with Tasha's description of "hood school." If we review the previous section, "Home Training is School Training," we may now take into consideration the home life of a student who is sleeping in class to the point of drooling as well as the message of concern that has been communicated to the other students by the teacher. Furthermore, we can argue that this would not be the behavior of a skilled educator in a predominately middle class, White school.

Cultural Mismatch

After reviewing the Student Support Team (SST) paperwork for each student again *after* the interviews as well as reviewing the audio with a specific focus on linguistic patterns, I found a disturbing trend that landed each of these students in special education. Each of these students was referred to special education in response to "deficits" in phonemic awareness. Phonemic

awareness is defined as the awareness, or understanding, that speech and words are composed as series of sounds (Yopp, 1992). Phonemic awareness is described as a foundational skill needed for oral reading fluency (Yopp, 1992). As a critical researcher, I listened to the linguistic patterns of these students flavored with a southern, urban dialect, and I realized that these students were not only being penalized for their different cultural norms but also for their different linguistic patterns.

The writing samples of the students reiterated this realization. When I spoke with these students, they did not appear to have difficulties in any area--they initiated conversation, asked questions, and shared opinions in the same manner as their "non-dis/abled" peers. However, when it came to their writing, the students wrote exactly as they spoke. Each student asked for help with their spelling several times while attempting to write. When I told them that spelling didn't count and to sound it out, Justin and Nate shared concerns of not wanting to get it wrong. As a critical researcher, my first thought was "what does this child need?" By examining their work, I found they were in fact aware of phonemes but needed assistance in understanding what standard English rule applied to what they were hearing and sounding out as they wrote. Again, this suggested to me that this was not a dis/ability, but a missed opportunity for instruction to be targeted and provided in a space that was commonly overlooked or assumed to be "simple." Therefore, I argue that student linguistic differences in addition to cultural differences were not truly met prior to the referral to Special Education. Instead, the opportunity to build parallels to standard English was ignored, assumed to be a blanket dis/ability, and students slipped further behind the crowd. Students consequently responded with self-doubt—not wanting to get it wrong—and required a great deal of prompting to gain the confidence to even *feel* capable. Once capacity was increased, students were comfortable with trying; thus, reiterating that students

were/are being judged by their ability to assimilate to the White, middle class standard for linguistics—not their true intellectual ability.

Conclusion

The stories from these interviews illustrated an experience that asks the question, "How can we expect success?" Considering the concepts these students were able to learn and excel in outside of school—cooking, caretaking, sports, and even video games—one cannot help but question how a child can be dis/abled in one setting but fully capable in another. As educators we must ask ourselves, are we dis/abling children simply because we are giving more power to the status quo instead of the children we are called to serve? The perspectives of these children have suggested that they are being robbed of reaching their full potential simply because they are not assimilating to White, middle class culture. It appears that educators are prematurely pulling the plug on student academic development because they do not have the time, experience, or training to *show* student of varying linguistic and cultural backgrounds how to approach new concepts. More alarmingly, there appears to be a sense of apathy that the students have internalized from educators who don't appear to care about the struggles with their basic needs.

To be a Black child in an impoverished community, receiving a chaotic educational experience characterized by norms that do not fit their lived reality, and ultimately labeled as dis/abled by the system, is a recipe for failure. The perspectives of these children demonstrate that they are implicitly told that if they are not able to assimilate to the "acceptable" culture of White, middle class citizens, then they are savagely dis/abled (Tuck & Yang, 2012).

The results of these interviews affirm that these students are cognizant of the state of their school community and are in the beginning stages of articulating these issues while developing their own critical perspective. In other words, they are currently developing their awareness of

the position that has been thrust upon them as children deemed dis/able. These are students who

began school from a different cultural space than what they were expected to thrive in. Due to

the inequities of a larger system, those differences are seldom valued and understood.

It is evident that these students recognize that the frustration they have experienced with

their school environment and the larger community is bigger than themselves, but they do not yet

recognize the implications it has had on their personal lives. Thus suggesting that the constructs

of society are dangerously becoming second nature, or "common sense" and almost acceptable to

them—a process that eventually force them to recreate the cycle of accepting and settling with

racial and economic inequity.

In this chapter, I collected the themes that became evident throughout the interviews and

data analysis process. In the following and final chapter, I discuss what these results mean in

relation to my specific research questions and current research. I offer recommendations on how

we can improve the current system to disrupt the present view of Special Education and learn to

recognize the value in cultures and communities that do not meet the White, middle class

standard.

Chapter 5: Now What?

"The South believed an educated Negro to be a dangerous Negro. And the South was not

wholly wrong; for education among all kinds of men always has had, and always will

have, an element of danger and revolution, of dissatisfaction and discontent.

Nevertheless, men strive to know."

-W.E.B Dubois, Souls of Black Folk

It is the labeling of dis/ability that makes it permissible to exclude the poor, Black child.

If a child is not learning in the manner that one is teaching, it has become acceptable to label that

child dis/abled in order to take the blame from the educator and place it on the child. This

liberates the educator and imprisons the child. Therefore, the students who do not assimilate to

the dominant white, middle class culture that is reflected in the education system arguably

become the students who are later labeled as dis/abled and denied access from a quality

education that values their differences (Alexander, 2010; Ferri & Connor, 2014; Connor, Ferri, &

Annamma, 2016; Lowe, 1997; Skiba, 2008). This phenomenon is arguably the leading cause of

the over-representation of economically-disadvantaged, Black children in Special Education.

As educators with prescriptive goals, we have subconsciously ignored the goals of

pluralistic communities and judged students by their ability to assimilate to White, middle-class

culture (Paris & Alim, 2017). The normalization of racism has become so systemically ingrained

that it is often unrecognizable to the oppressor and becomes the lived reality of the oppressed

(Tasha, 2016).

> *Everybody is different, and they were born in different ways. Everybody has different*
>
> *skills. It don't matter what people say about you. It just they know that you are smart and*
>
> *intelligent.*

When Tasha made this statement, it becomes evident that she, as an 11-year-old girl who has been eligible for special education services since the age of five, recognizes that she *along with* her colleagues have characteristics that make them different from each other but *not* inferior to each other. However, if she is valued as a child who is smart and intelligent regardless of those differences, she is content. When questioned about her perspective on disability, she responds by stating that she has asthma under the belief that dis/ability is a fixed issue that one has no control over.

The unfortunate reality of this scenario, however, is that Tasha has had decisions made about her ability by outside forces since the age of five. This practice of referring students to the Student Support Team (SST) forces educators and parents to presume that all students should be academically and behaviorally performing at a certain rate in a certain way by a certain age (Solis & Connor, 2006). When students do not satisfy this presumption, a process to prove that something is "wrong" ensues; the process often results in the label of some form of disability that a child must wear for the rest of his or her academic career (Solis & Connor, 2006). I found that it was the level of linguistic exposure that limited Tasha's ability to fully articulate herself, but not her level of intelligence. Not surprisingly, her evaluation results listed her non-verbal intelligence significantly higher than her verbal. This should have been a red flag in the evaluation process to indicate that there was more to Tasha than where she fell in the process of being measured up to the White, middle class standard. Instead, it was a faulty "Aha!" moment for an educator looking to exonerate themselves from failing to teach a child.

In this chapter, I discuss the overall implications of the results from chapter four. I begin with redefining ability, identity, and economic status through an analysis with student's perspectives. I then discuss the limitations of my findings, the implications for future research, and my reflection on the data collection process.

Defining Ability – "I Got Asthma."

The participants of this study did not view themselves as disabled. Whether at home or at school, the participants recognize that there may be times they needed have needed clarity on a concept as it was being taught, but it did not equate to them feeling incapable or dis/abled. These students saw disability as a fixed condition experienced by individuals who simply could not do what other people could. They regarded these visible disabilities as problems that were out of the control of the person affected; thus, unarming the existence of the more subjective, invisible disabilities (Solis & Connor, 2006).

The participants spoke of disability with a tone of sympathy as opposed to empathy. In other words, even when *learning* disability was discussed, it was not a term that the participants easily identified with. Instead, it was a term the participants appeared to feel sorry about. Collectively, students did not see themselves as incapable of meeting the same standards as their "non-disabled" peers. This suggests that while these students may need extra support from the teacher at times since they have been "disabled" by the system—and are aware of such—they feel confident that they can succeed once that assistance or support is received.

Each participant provided an activity that they took pride in outside of school. To approach these activities, the participants each shared how their instructor—parent, family member, or coach—took a special interest in showing them how to complete a task. The participants expected to receive help when they reached a point of difficulty but still

demonstrated the pride and desire they held in being able to accomplish that task independently. This aligned with their view of dis/ability as something that could not be changed. They recognized that there was always room for improvement if they did not understand something the first time. This suggests that we, as educators, have equated needing help with a lack of ability while non-academic entities have recognized that with showing a child how to approach a new concept and supporting him or her through it, they can be successful. In other words, educators have been conditioned to believe that if a student needs more help than we are willing or have the time to give, then they must be inherently dis/abled. The students that sat before me during the interviews, however, were not inherently dis/abled, they had been dis/abled by the school system (Connor, 2015).

In this process of defining ability, I maintain the argument that the school system, in an attempt to uphold the White, middle class gold standard, is responsible for disabling economically disadvantaged, Black students. If a child is capable of absorbing the lessons that is most pertinent to his or her lived reality, we must question how he or she can suddenly be considered dis/abled when forced to absorb lessons that are completely disconnected from their reality.

Maintaining Identity – *"They* have their *own* ways…"

Linguistic and cultural variances evidenced in the responses of the young participants demonstrated that their experiences were appropriate for the needs of their lived reality. Economic status suggested that each student started school with less exposure to middle class concepts than educators expect, but not any less capable. Each participant discussed the effects of violence in the community and the lack of discipline in the classroom as inhibitors of their success. Therefore, it is no surprise that the need to teach self-protection is prioritized by their

caregivers. "Home training" is built around how to be safe outside of the home; thus equipping ED, Black students with a very different skill-set than what children in a White, middle class community may begin school with.

Race was not considered to be a mitigating factor to academic achievement by the participants. They were each confident in their love and acknowledgement of who they were as young Black children. However, the participants demonstrated a sense of resistance of the dominant culture. Kevin explained that he did not want to 'speak' like White people, while Nate exclaimed that his grandmother informed him that White teachers do not truly care about Black students. While the correlation with academic achievement was not overtly displayed in the student responses, further research may reveal subconscious, internalized, or embedded norms that may have developed around resisting the White, middle class norms. In other words, the participants may not have been able to address the correlation between academia and race because their placement in a homogenous Black community would have limited their exposure to variances in expectations based on race. Currently, the young participants viewed White, middle class culture as a threat on a superficial level, yet were unaware of the more deeply rooted, historical occurrences that led to this sense of resistance.

Regarding Economic Equity – "It got rats in there…"

While I argue that the students at this age do not feel held back by their race, they certainly feel affected by their economic status. In the final round of the focus groups, I asked students to discuss their immediate community and how they felt towards it. In this discussion, each participant cited the violence that took place in their community as a prominent issue. They each agreed that the state of their community was a hindrance to receiving a quality education. Tasha and Nate both discussed the concerns around active shooting and frequent lockdowns. A

typical lockdown within this community could last anywhere from 30 to 45 minutes—the entire length of an elementary instructional period. In a similar fashion, Kevin discussed feeling like the kids in the neighborhoods were getting "messed up in the head" as they had begun stealing cars, skipping school, and committing other petty crimes in the neighborhood.

When it came to class/economic status, Tasha shared that the school they attended was considered a hood school. She described a hood school as a school that does not teach but allows the students to just have fun. This was an indication of how the community viewed the school in contrast to what the school believed they were doing for that community. Further research is needed to determine how that belief affects the student's beliefs towards schools.

Nate also spoke to the issues with connectivity and access to electronic resources in the building. When asked about his opinion on testing, he shared that while he is okay with testing, he is often frustrated that the equipment needed is not ready for student use. This point indirectly highlights the commonality of technology to be only semi-conducive to learning in an under-resourced environment—even in settings as important as a standardized test or district assessment.

Justin's description of the uncleanliness of the school environment solidified the fact that students like these are expected to prosper in an environment that is unkept—reinforcing concerns of negligence in the environment of schools that predominately serve ED, Black students. The very same concerns discussed nearly 30 years ago by Jonathan Kozol (1991) in *Savage Inequalities*. This display of poorly kept capital and human resources is another indicator of the domino effect of the historical, systemic devaluation of economically disadvantaged, Black lives.

Therefore, I would argue that when it comes to the intersectionality of race, class, and ability, economically disadvantaged, Black students regard themselves as capable, Black students who recognize that they have been held back by the collective economic status of their community—an already disenfranchised community burdened with generational poverty.

Limitations of Findings

There were four major limitations that I noted in this study. These limitations included student placement, exposure, timing, and student-relationship. In this section I discuss possible limitations to the acquisition of data.

Student Placement. The students in this study have been placed into general education classes. They each receive co-teaching services from the special education teacher in the general education setting for their English/Language Arts (ELA) segment as opposed to being pulled out into the Special Education resource room. Because these students have been mainstreamed, they may be less likely to acknowledge their disability in the same context as those making decisions for them (Solis & Connor, 2016). The placement of these four participants in co-taught, general education settings as opposed to a special education resource setting implicates a limitation in this study. While IEP records demonstrate that each student in the study has been supported through the Early Intervention Program (EIP)—a program for students performing behind the curve but not diagnosed with a learning disability—or resource hours in the special education classroom at some point, their present experience was one in which they had the opportunity to engage consistently with their "non-disabled" peers. This may affect how they view themselves as students who have been labeled with a disability.

Variances in Exposure. An additional limitation was the level of exposure these students had to life outside their community. I believe that the realm of exposure had a limiting effect on

the development of their baseline for what a quality learning environment and community should look like. In other words, this community was all they knew. Perhaps, if there had been more opportunities for them to compare their lived reality with their *expected* lived reality, their voices would have been more defined with concepts like race. As a result, discipline in school and violence in their communities proved to be of the utmost importance to these children as their basic safety could not be guaranteed (Smith, 2011). Economically disadvantaged schools that are pressured to quickly "close the gap," limit opportunities for students to be creative and express themselves in a manner that allows them to develop their voice and self-expression (Cavendish, Artiles, & Harry, 2014; Dixson & Rosseau, 2005).

Timing. I interviewed the students in May at the end of the school year. On a high note, they had a full school year of experience with the new school model introduced by a school turnaround initiative. This allowed the participants the ability to compare the school environment they had once known prior to the present school year and the trajectory of their new experience. However, this timing also affected my original schedule for interviewing students. Originally, I sought to conduct the focus groups on several different days; thus, allowing students a natural observation and processing time. Due to fifth grade graduation trips and events, as well as one student's suspension, I found myself having to request to conduct Focus Groups 2-4 (Ability, Race, and Economics) in one setting. I then had to interview one student individually. While I was able to easily add his vantage point to those of his peers, he missed the ability to collaborate with his peers on their school experience.

Student-Teacher Relationship. The final limitation that I noted was my role in the lives of these students as their teacher and special education case manager. This allowed students to be comfortable without an extensive relationship building process; however I also noted that they

attempted to choose their words carefully when referring to other teachers. They appeared to be concerned about getting their teacher in trouble. As a school with a new turnaround model, several focus groups were held throughout the year by external companies. Such data collection procedures seemed to initially put students on guard—indirectly exposing how accustomed they had become to having their voices muted. Throughout the interview I reassured students several times that their statements would not go back to their teacher and would be reported anonymously.

I do not believe these limitations negatively impacted my data on a grand scale, however, they are important to note as having a possible impact on my data collection process.

Reflection

As a sociology major from 2001-2005, I can see that discussions about equity in public education remain the same in nature over a decade later. Schools that are charged with educating poor, Black children continue to fail them in what appears to be an attempt to maintain the position of poor and minoritized communities on the bottom rung of society. In the eyes of the children I interviewed, I saw a Chef, capable and personable enough to one day establish her own popular restaurant; I saw a Legislator, capable and passionate about improving the state of his community; I saw an Educator, capable and full with the kind of empathetic compassion needed to transform lives; and I saw a Basketball Player, capable, dedicated, and hardworking enough to become a symbol of inspiration for his community and a symbol pride for his family. But, when I looked down at their Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), all I saw was "dis/abled." A horrifying mismatch. A mismatch that I knew from my 13 years of teaching, would eventually lean more toward what I saw on the IEP.

I have found that formal research supporting the discussion of inequity in education dates back to the late 1960s (Dunn, 1968), yet the issues have not been well-addressed among classroom educators. When I consider the fight for Blacks to build and run their own schools during the Reconstruction Era as well as the pride many have had in simply learning how to read, I recognize that the process to gain full access to a high-quality education has been an arduous process for Black Americans—particularly poor Black Americans— for a substantially long time (Foner, 1998).

After being a special education teacher for over a decade, I found the data collection/analysis process of this study was both confirming and alarming. Economically disadvantaged, Black children are being penalized for being exposed to a lived reality that is not reflected in a "common" curriculum. As the pressure to showcase data that exhibits immense growth becomes more important for schools—particularly urban schools, it has become justifiable to exclude students who would negatively affect those numbers. Therefore, students in need of more quality support than a teacher has the time or ability to give due to the need to meet testing deadlines, are quickly pushed through the SST process, labeled disabled, and omitted from the data. This process essentially protects the teacher from having to do more for poor, Black and differently exposed children. Thus, making it permissible to solely focus on the children who are "easier" to teach and hand the "difficult" ones off to the special education teacher. Needless to say, in my teaching career there have only been a small number of ED, Black children labeled with a learning disability that I found to truly be "disabled" in some way. Those students met the criteria for classic dyslexia, dysgraphia, or dyscalculia. Students not falling in those categories simply needed an instructor who was willing to pay attention to *how* they learned and deliver the material in a manner that was conducive to their learning.

It was also eye-opening to learn that the participants in this study recognized that race set them apart but did not feel that it was a hindrance to the quality of education they received. This realization was powerful because race is regarded as a major factor in educational equity by adults who have studied it. It leads me to question whether or not students are truly unbothered by race as children in a highly minoritized school or if this response is a symptom of internalized oppression.

Reflection on impact on research site/individuals. The school in which the interviews were collected is managed by a Charter Management Organization (CMO) that is contracted to improve low-performing schools as a turnaround initiative. While the cleanliness of the school remained a disappointing reflection of the larger community, the school has taken steps toward providing a holistic assistance to students and families. This year the students began to see the presence of a behavior management team, more consistent procedures, smaller class sizes, mental health counseling, and access to volunteer lawyers and advocates.

This research has the potential to impact the way teachers at schools that serve a high population of ED, Black students approach staff development. It is important that educators begin to develop their self-awareness as well as their awareness of the presence of each child's inner world and lived reality. Educators of *all* races must be equipped with the time and tools necessary to recognize their own perpetuation of a White, middle class ideology and take inventory of how such an antiquated approach can damage the educational experience and trajectory of a poor, Black child. Completing transforming this approach would allow educators to better address the needs of students, while being mindful of the limitations placed on poor, Black students.

Implications for future practice in local context

Structural change as it relates to systemic issues of racism and classism is needed to truly transform this issue of disproportionality in Special Education. As previously mentioned, a difference in approach should be done to support the academic development of ED, Black children without the imposition of a disability label. While I do believe that there are several school systems and management organizations that have taken the appropriate steps to address educating the whole child, there is still a need for significant changes in policy. After reviewing the themes I identified from the interviews, I highlighted four missing elements that may have prevented these students from being placed in special education and thereby eliminating the overuse of the term "dis/abled":

(1) Smaller Class Sizes

(2) Intentional Teacher-Student Relationships

(3) Intentional Exposure

(4) Safe, Holistic Learning Environments

Smaller Class Sizes

During the third-grade memory walk, the participants shared that they were subject to large class sizes with constant distractions. This also happened to be the grade level that three of the four participants were referred to Special Education through the Student Support Team (SST). Students spoke heavily about their concerns with discipline and behavior management. They were keenly aware that the lack thereof had a negative effect on their learning.

Extensive research has been conducted on Class Size Reduction (CSR) that has demonstrated the overall effectiveness of smaller class sizes for all children (Haenn, 2002; Achilles, 2003). K-2 students in smaller class sizes of 11 to 21 outperformed students in class

sizes of 23 and above for the same age group (Haenn, 2002). Considering the national third grade

benchmark, it is safe to posit that economically disadvantaged students should be afforded

smaller class sizes to get the proper instruction, attention, and exposure needed to approach the

expected academic milestones.

Smaller class sizes also affords classroom educators the ability to form meaningful

relationship with students. Educators should be keenly aware of each child's lived reality in a

manner that allows them to recognize the portions of that reality that are then brought into the

classroom. A smaller class size affords educators the ability to this time, while learning how

utilize each child's strengths to help them connect to the curriculum in a way that is suitable for

the child. This allows instructors to spend more time understanding how a child learns *and* obtain

direct feedback from the child on what he or she needs to be successful. This also allows both

teacher and student the time to be more reflective and therefore self-aware during the learning

process.

Once class sizes are reduced, professional learning for building intentional teacher-

student relationships with students must be conducted to ensure that students within the

classroom room feel valued as individuals. This ensures the efficiency of class size reduction. It

is imperative that the smaller class size is not viewed as a break for classroom educators, but as

an opportunity to offer educators the time and space needed to recognize and understand the

personal strengths of each student and how to meet their needs.

Intentional Teacher-Student Relationships

Students who rated their relationship with their teacher high in emotional support seemed

to have a more positive approach towards academics—even when their teachers reported less

positive relationships (White, 2016). This suggests that students view their relationship with their

teachers as a gateway to academic achievement regardless of their race, class, and ability. During

the individual interviews, students each reinforced their desire to establish and maintain quality

student-teacher relationships. However, when asked if they would prefer a teacher who cared

about them but did not efficiently educate them, or a teacher that delivered quality instruction but

did not care about them personally, it was interesting to note that 75% of the participants opted

for a teacher that delivered quality instruction. These responses demonstrated that being a

successful adult was high in importance for these children and the primary expectation of adults

was to prepare them for their future. From the tone of their responses, one could infer that these

students had become so familiar with the lack of quality student-teacher relationships that they

simply wanted to know that the teacher would help them to be successful regardless of how the

teacher felt toward the child.

Children—particularly younger children—tend to view their relationships with their

teachers more positively than the teacher views the relationship (White, 2016). This could be due

to unfavorable bids for the attention of teachers or peers. Because each student shared that

receiving help from their teacher when needed was important, it is safe to assume that the

participants equated help to care. Therefore, the participants seemed less likely to clearly

recognize whether a teacher cared about them or not once they deemed that teacher as helpful on

their road to success. At this age, students generally desire to be successful. To achieve that

success, they seek help from their instructors. Once that help, or clarity, is received, the student

equates that attention with love and ultimately validation of who they are as "good, hard-working

children."

Instituting intentional teacher-student pairs such as school-based mentors, ensures that

students coming from such communities receive a positive connection to an adult in the building

(White, 2016). As the students in this study spoke consistently about love, they sought to connect with their teachers in a manner that went beyond the mechanics of the classroom. This need is arguably derived from each participant's need for a guiding human connection—a connection that may be lacking due to having one parent in the home who must work long hours to make ends meet, a large number of children in the home all grappling for attention, or lack of mental health resources of the parent. Such relationships, when orchestrated with intention, could inspire children in a non-academic setting to develop skills that can be transferred to the academic setting.

Intentional teacher-student relationships should include:

- Ongoing Professional Development on building effective relationships with students

- Ongoing Professional Development that allows educators to engage in discussions about recognizing and challenging systemic inequities as it relates to their students

- The strategic matching of students with mentors of similar interests or background

- Time that is consistently designated for bonding

- Structured activities for the teacher and student to participate in together

A structure, intentional approach to building teacher-student relationships has the potential to increase student aspirations and therefore positively affect their approach towards academics (Lee & Crammond, 1999). Lee & Cramond (1999) posit that mentors for economically disadvantaged students also have the capacity to make their mentee aware of opportunities that align with their career goals. This structured approach ensures efficiency and

offers children the hope and purpose necessary to begin the process of disrupting the cycle of generational poverty.

Deliberate Exposure

The current approach to education leads economically disadvantaged, Black students to develop feelings of inadequacy by striving for a bar that as was never set with them in mind. The participants in this study are not yet at an age where they fully grasp or recognize the difference in culture and linguistics or the dis/abling process that takes place due to the devaluation of their culture and linguistics. In accordance with mentorship, deliberate exposure to environments outside of the immediate community of the participants can be beneficial to the development of future career goals and present academic achievement. Because many people in the US generally tend to reside in segregated communities, the limited experiences of the participants causes them to be relatively fearful of White Americans and resistant to being forced to assimilate to White, middle class culture. Students within this study and throughout my career in education were often concerned with "acting White," "talking White," or doing things that "only White people did." As a result, the students felt comfortable in their community even though they seemed to understand that the condition of their community was a hindrance to their success. Their comfort can easily be transformed into allegiance—a byproduct of maintaining their identity.

Deliberate exposure ensures that students do not only have access to various opportunities, but they are ushered toward them. This would eliminate fear of the unknown and encourage poor, Black students to develop their curiosity by taking greater risks by pushing the boundaries of their prescribed limitations. This would also ensure that students are given the opportunity to develop their strengths in a manner that does not consistently highlight their

weaknesses against the White, middle class; thus, building self-confidence and establishing

drive.

Students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds also require deliberate exposure

to concepts outside of their community along with engagement in a curriculum that celebrates

and respects their cultural perspectives and experiences (Tomlinson & Jarvis, 2014). In their

research of successful schools with a high population of economically disadvantaged students,

they noted that educators who took a special interest in delivering curriculum that included

African-American Literature and engaged students in discussing societal controversy were

considered the most engaging (Tomlinson & Jarvis, 2014). Therefore, the combination deliberate

exposure to outside of each child's immediate community, as well as allowing students to

witness the representation of themselves in the curriculum allows them to imagine themselves

thriving outside of their immediate community.

Safe, Holistic Learning Environments

Safety was a major concern for the participants. Violence, drugs, and prostitution ran

rampant in their neighborhoods. The school, as a center of the community, was not immune.

Prostitutes, drug houses, and police activity occurred only steps from the school. I have even

witnessed a transaction between a prostitute and john while sitting on the playground. Not only

did the children bear witness to these things first hand, but they wanted to see an end to them—

particularly when that violence entered the school and would place the school on lockdown.

As students begin to feel safe, they are better able to focus on academics. Community-

based solutions are needed as the issues of safety originate in the community (Thurston &

Berkeley, 2003). However, where the school is concerned, a more holistic approach to teaching

students what a community should feel like may be beneficial from the school perspective

(Thurston & Berkeley, 2003). Peaceable schools, as described by Thurston & Berkeley, is a space in which "all human interactions [are] based on an ideal of valuing human dignity and esteem (Fishbaugh, Schroth, & Berkeley, 2003, p. 136)." They go on to describe it as "a warm and caring community characterized by co- operation, communication, tolerance, positive emotional expression, and conflict resolution" (Fishbaugh, Schroth, & Berkeley, 2003, p. 136). While this is not an immediate fix to children who have experienced trauma, this helps participants to progress past the survival mindset created prior to beginning school and into a place that equips them with the personal tools to confront generational poverty. Therefore, caring and explicitly teaching children to care for themselves and others is helpful to building a moral community that honors the linguistic and cultural individuality of each child (Fishbaugh, Schroth, & Berkeley, 2003; Smith, 2011).

Again, in order to carry out such an approach effectively, educators must engage in professional development opportunities that facilitate crucial conversations on the community. During such conversations, educators must be offered a professional safe space to:

- Examine and challenge their own implicit bias

- Ask uncomfortable questions about misunderstood norms in the community

- Examine middle class norms that have been accepted as "The Rule"

- Examine literature on Culturally Relevant / Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy

- Engage in strengths-based dialogues on student achievement

- Intentional cultural exposure for educators

Such a space, allows educators to provide a safe, holistic learning environment for the students as they develop their understanding of a cultures that vary from their own. As a sense of

compassion develops through true understanding and engagement, a shift in mindset can occur that essentially shifts the academic culture of the school.

Implications for future research

These findings only gently scratch the surface of the issue of disproportionality in special education as it pertains to economically-disadvantaged, Black students. The concepts of disproportionality and gaps in achievement based on race and economics have been studied repeatedly for decades. Therefore, it is important for future research that continues to seek out under-researched perspectives that may potentially hold or affirm what students need to be successful.

The next step in listening to voices that have been marginalized is to understand how the views of these students evolve and what causes that evolution to take place. Future research could include a comparison of student voices in elementary, middle, and high school, as well as an analysis of the views of White, middle class students who have been labeled with a learning disability. Future research may also include an evaluation of the implementation of the four missing elements identified in this study: smaller class sizes, intentional teacher-student relationships, deliberate exposure, and a safe, holistic learning environment.

Longitudinal Study

A study of this nature could benefit greatly from a more ethnographic approach that considers the evolution of student attitudes. A comparison of the same student voices in elementary, middle, and high school would offer a greater picture of how these student matriculate from their final year of elementary to their final year of high school. As students develop the skills to articulate their point of view with more clarity, their experiences would allow a more in-depth view of what is needed to ensure the success of ED, Black students

labeled with a disability. Furthermore, it would be wise to note how their attitudes change and what factors contribute to that change.

Additional Focus Groups

Hosting focus groups for middle-class, White students labeled with a learning disability as well as ED, White students labeled with a learning disability could also be beneficial to understanding the experiences of each demographical group. This would allow researchers to draw a more accurate conclusion of the differences that may exist in the school environment and the special education referral process. This would also allow researchers to better isolate the impact of race and economics, as a precursor for making an argument of the intersection of the three.

Conclusion

When the Constitution was written, Black slaves counted as three-fifths of a person toward the population of Southern states. This "compromise" suppressed the population of Southern states to limit the allotted number of representatives in Congress (Alexander, 2010; Foner, 1998; Foner, 2015). Today, in an eerily similar manner students who are considered beginning or developing learners are valued at 0.0 and 0.5 respectively, towards the school's College and Career Readiness Performance Index (CCRPI) school, thus deeming the population of a school as failing when students do not meet the expectations for standardized testing without regard for individual talent or growth (CCRPI Resources for Educators, 2018). When the demographics of schools that are deemed as failing are examined, it is no surprise that they are schools with total populations of 90% or more of ED, Black Students, with 40% or more of those students being categorized as beginning or developing learners (Georgia School Reports, 2018).

It is time for these historical trends for excluding poor, Black children from receiving a quality education to be openly and regularly addressed. These trends have been sorely embedded into our culture; making it permissible to dismiss an entire population of children as innate failures. Because educators of all races are primarily trained on White, middle class principles, it must be recognized that this practice cripples teachers from working with economically disadvantaged, Black children in a manner that is effective (Dimitiradis, 2008). As a result, children who do not conform are ostracized and set on a path to eventually be labeled deficient—thus making it permissible to exclude them from the general population (Lam, 2014).

While the concepts that rose to the forefront in this study were easily backed with research over a decade old, it is imperative that all stakeholders recognize that there is still much to be done to support the ED, Black children prior to/instead of referring them to special education. If we as educators authentically set out to offer students what they have verbalized that they need to be successful, we may finally see a notable decrease in Special Education Referrals and a significant rise in the achievement of economically disadvantaged, Black students.

The participants of this study have made their voices heard on their ability as economically disadvantaged, Black students. They are *not* disabled. Nor do they believe the color of their skin is a hindrance to their success. Their financial circumstances, however, have limited their access to a safe, quality education as well as a safe, collaborative community. Therefore, we must revisit the purpose and process of Special Education services when it comes to children in economically disadvantage, minoritized communities. Special Education in these communities should *not* be considered if the school has not provided the previously mentioned implications:

(1) Smaller Class Sizes

(2) Intentional Teacher-Student Relationships

(3) Intentional Exposure

(4) Safe, Holistic Learning Environments

As it stands, the current system is hurdling ED, Black students through schools that favor a culture that is not relatable to their lived experiences. As a result, only the children who can "assimilate" to White, Middle Class culture—regardless of the race of their teacher—are viewed as capable of success. Students who do not are viewed as deficient. Education policy must begin to lean toward creating a pluralistic, multicultural teaching and learning environment where educators are consistently given the tools and support needed to embrace varied skill sets, backgrounds, and cultures. In order to successfully reform education—namely Special Education—we must take the value of a student's ability out of inanimate test scores and place in back into the human experience.

The students in this study are the students who have received the opposite of a head start at life as measured by the current school system. These are students who prefer an interactive role in their overall learning experience—an experience that is characterized by a relationship with the instructor, individualized attention when necessary, immediate progress monitoring, praise, and a chance at independence. These are students who want to learn but require explicit social and academic guidance that honors their cultural perspective and experiences in a safe, caring environment. The voices of these students are not voices to be ignored. They are voices to be heard, discussed, and acted upon.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Student Survey

NAME:	GRADE:
I WISH MY TEACHER KNEW…	

KEVIN

I WISH MY TEACHER KNEW......

how to stop smocking on that gum but I really wish that my teacher knew how to teach me how to do my reading alot more esezy. but when it was the end of the reag then she start geeting hard on me but at the same time it was geeting esesyer and eseyer but I still love both of my teachers

NATE

I WISH MY TEACHER KNEW......

that i have a great side and that i am great in math and reading and that i love her she was a graet teacher and she was so nice to me.

JUSTIN

I WISH MY TEACHER KNEW.....

I aove school I iove math be cause can get more help.

It means that my teachers nould nnow that I love my n ice teacher. at school.

TASHA

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inspirational trata
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One thing I would want
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APPENDIX B

1. Tell me about yourself.

2. How old are you?

3. What grade are you in?

4. Tell me your favorite things to do at school.

5. Tell me about the best day at school.

6. Tell me about your favorite things to do at home.

7. Tell me about the best day at home. A day that you did not have to go to school.

8. How often do your teachers ask you questions about your life outside of school?

9. How does your teacher help you learn?

10. What is your favorite subject? *(After response)* What do you like about it?

11. What makes you feel good about school?

12. What frustrates you about school?

13. What do you think you are the best at in school? *(After response)* What makes you so good at [that]?

14. What do you think you are the best at outside of school? *(After response)* What makes you so good at [that]?

15. Who else thinks you are good at [that]? *(After response)* How do you know?

16. Tell me about your worst day at school. *(After response)* How did you feel the next day at school?

17. Tell me the subject that you do not like. *(After response)* Why not?

18. What do you think you are not very good in at school?

19. What do you think you are not very good at, at home?

20. Do you think you can improve in either of [those things]? *(After response)* How do you

   know?

21. Does anyone else think you are not very good at [that]? *(After response)* How do you

   know?

22. Do you think your teachers believe that you will be successful one day?

23. Who is your favorite teacher? Why?

24. Who is your *least* favorite teacher? Why?

25. If you could change one thing about school, your classroom, or your teachers, what would

   it be?

TASHA

Time: 9:57

Ok, so tell me about yourself, who is Miss Tasha?

Uhm, a person who likes to have fun and uhm laugh make jokes.

Alright, how old are you?

11

Ok, tell me your favorite thing to do at school.

Favorite thing to do is talk with my friend Alia and Ellen because they are funny, like we are

always laughing. Ellen is always tickling me!

Ok, so tell me about your best day at school.

My best day at school? My best days is mostly everyday because I get to spend time with my

friends and lunch and recess or in class.

Alright, tell me what's your favorite thing to do at home?

Favorite things to do at home is play outside because it is getting hot, or eat some ice cream and

watch a movie on Netflix (pause) or uhm, play in my mom's makeup.

Ok, tell me about your best day at home.

My best day at home is when, uhm, if my sister is doing something to my other sister, it makes me laugh. My sister is always trying to smush me. Cause uhm yesterday we were in the car right and she just kept trying to sit on me. I had to get up just for her not to sit on me.

How often do you feel like your teachers ask you questions about your life?

They'll ask me what I do at home and what kind of game did I play, where I go at home.

Ok, and when do they usually do that?

Uh, when it's recess or lunch because that's the only time we get to, you know, have fun. Lunch and Recess.

Ok, cool! How do you think your teachers help you learn?

She help us learn because, uhm, she explains, like breaks it down so we can know what it means... and then we just have to understand it cause of the way she broke it down... we have to understand it.

Ok What's your favorite subject?

Uh, favorite subject is reading.

Ok why reading?

Because when you're reading you get to explore different things in books.

OK! That's a good reason! What makes you feel good about school?

Uhm, like when nice people are around and you get to do funny things and spend a lot of times with your friends until the end of the year.

OK! What frustrates you about school?

Uhm... when people be annoying.

Give me an example.

Like if you...this boy named Bryce. You know Bryce? He always making chicken sound and stuff and then he annoys everybody. But, I be laughing because it's silly to me. I laugh at everything.

So, what do you think you are best at in school?

What I'm best at? Uhm, I'm best at being funny, or uhm, a lot of things!

What do you think you are best at outside of school?

Outside of school.... uhm.. I'm good at cooking at home.

Mm, okay, what can you cook?

I can cook... I just learned how to cook steak! Now I know how to cook hamburger helper. My mom teach me last night. She said you have to put the noodles in boiling water, and then you have to cook the meat... then the meat after you boil the, uhm, macaroni shells, then you put the meat and mix it together and then put some sauce in there and the uhm tomato sauce. Then you take it out of there and put it in a big old pan and put some cheese on top of it!

So who thinks you are good at that?

My mama, my whole family.

Alright, so tell me about one of your worst day at school?

My worst days are when people say I read baby books. Or, uhm, or if.. well that's mostly it.

Yea? And how does that make you feel?

Sad

Ok... so tell me a subject that you don't like.

Hmm, I don't like Social Studies

A lot of kids say social studies! Why don't you like social studies?

Because, uhm, in my class when we learn about social studies we only learn about the same

people over and over. In social studies, or science, you supposed to do like experiments, but we

don't do them, we mostly read passages. Ms. Greer always makes us read passages.

Social Studies used to be my favorite... but we did a lot of projects.

Yea, we don't do projects!! I never had one project in fifth grade!

No projects at all?

No. We only do projects and stuff with Ms. Wright.

For Math?

And science!

Ok, and do you prefer projects?

Mmhm

Ok, what do you think you are not very good at in school?

Uhm, math.

WHat about at home? WHat do you think is something you aren't really good at at home?

Uhm. Being fast.

Being fast? What do you mean?

Cause my mom will ask us to do a million things and then I be moving slow.

Alright, how do you think you can improve with either of those things... whether it be math or moving faster at home?

Uhh, try to do one thing at a time? Or try to put more energy in your body. Or math you can work on it at home or something

Alright do you think your teachers believe in you?

Yea

Yea? You think they think you are going to be successful?

Mmhm

That's good! Who is your favorite teacher?

Ms. Greer.

Ok. Why is she your favorite teacher?

Cause she's funny, she always, uhm, cause we was doing a reading passage and you had to make

an action about it, like a uhm, performance, and she did a cat jumping and trying to eat a bird and

it was funny, she jumped up the table and I almost fell. It was funny.

So who is your least favorite teacher?

Least favorite teacher? Out of this school, or out of my class?

Out of your school. You can even think about teachers you had before.

Least favorite teachers.... Ms. Smith.

Yea, why?

Because when I, first I was in her class, and when I was in her class, she was being mean.

Because if it was somebody else talking, she took all of my points where I didn't have nothing.

Oh wow, so she wasn't very fair?

No, Now she's nice.

Ok, but you don't have her as a teacher anymore?

All I have is Ms. Greer and Ms, Wright. They nice teachers.

Do you feel like they care about you?

Yes

What tells you that they care?

Because if someone brings a death threat then they go away and then they'll tell us don't worry about it. Ms, Wright is funny too because she is always staring in outer space. And then we look at her, and then we always laugh. Cause she don't be know we're lookin at her. we'll sneak and then look at her. She all...'why is y'all looking at me?'

Alright last question. If you change one thing about school, your classroom, or your teachers, what would it be?

Mmm, have recess for two hours.

That's a long time! Why would you want recess for two hours?

Because we, my class, works really hard. And like, when we get in here, we have an itty bitty time to play. But when only used, when we play recess and lunch in uhm on Fridays, on Funky Fridays.

<u>KEVIN</u>

Time: 14:47

Researcher: Tell me about yourself. Who is Timothy?

Timothy*: Well, I'm Timothy and I'm the cool guy.

You're the cool guy? Okay!

So (pause), so what I really do. I played basketball for four years. I meant ever since I was four...

and the team that I play with is Paws Park... and I go there for after school.. so when I get out of

school I go straight to Paws Park.

So tell me your favorite thing to do at school.

(pause) learn?

OKay! What Else?

Play with my friends

Alright so describe to me, one of your best days at school? At it doesn't have to be this year.

It can be any school year.

Like last year at the end of the year, we got to play on our phones.

So why was that the best day?

Cause when, like when it comes around summer time, we had got each other's phone numbers so we can keep in touch with each other if we gone go to this school or not.

Alright, so tell me about some of your favorite things to do at home. So you talked about basketball a little bit, what else do you like to do at home?

(pause) Talk to my mom and my sisters. They like, joke a lot...

So they're funny?

Yea.

Are your sisters older or younger?

Older.

Alright so tell me about one of your best days at home.

The weekend

What do you do on the weekends?

I just play with my friends. I play on the game. Go to their house and play on the game. Or we'll ride they bike.. we'll ride my bike... we'll ride bikes.

Alright so, how often do you feel like you teachers ask you questions about your home life, about who you really are?

(Pause) A good person

How often do you think your teachers ask you what you do for fun?

Like when we are done with our work.

Do you think it's pretty often or not so often?

It is.

Alright, how does your teacher help you learn? And it doesn't have to be a teacher from this year, you can talk about any teacher? How do you think they helped you learn?

One-on-One

Do you think that's the best way for you to learn?

Mm-hm, or whole group, well like small group.

Small group? Why do you think small group is better?

Because like I'll probably be somewhere doing something and they'll probably check on me.

Cause when you keep doing something and you keep going wrong and nobody say nothing.

Ok, what's your favorite subject?

Math

Math? Really? Why do you like math?

Math is easy.

What makes it easy?

Like... (pause).. doing all the math. Problems.

So you like problem solving? So what makes you feel good about school?

(pause) Freedom

Freedom in what sense? Like explain that a little bit more...

Like, (pause) Uh.. uhm I would say like, We find it how, uhm, we can come along together, and like uhm, like get all my class together, cause my class they don't, act right though.

So what frustrates you about school? Something that you don't like about school at all.

All the reading

Ok, why reading?

Cause, when I read so much stuff like...(bows and shakes head) I gotta push through. I gotta go do it.

Ok that's good! OK, so what do you think you are best at at school?

(Long Pause)

Think about it like, it may be something you really, really like to do because it's easy for

you. It might be hard for someone else, but it's easy for you...

Staying in Control

What makes you good at that?

Cause, I know my parents don't play so I just do the right thing. I don't really get in trouble.

Yea I never hear of you in trouble! So, what do you think you are best at outside of school?

Basketball

How do you know you're good at basketball?

Cause, its like, every time I play, (pause)I'm that good

So who knows you're that good?

My friends, some teachers

Do you play for the school here?

Yea

Alright, so tell me now about your worst day at school...

(long pause)

Can you think of a day that was bad? It's okay to tell me.

Uhm, I don't really have bad days at school, I always have fun at school.

That's good! So tell me about a subject that you don't like.

(pause) Social Studies

Why?

Social Studies you gotta learn about everything, and you gotta go write about presidents and all of the states and stuff, but like Science is easy.

Alright, so, what do you think you are not very good at home?

(long pause) Being a big person. I mean I can do that but its hard at the same time. Cause I got three older sisters over me.

So what do you think you are not very good at, at school?

(long pause) I think... nothing

What do you think you can improve on in school?

My math

So you like Math, but you know that you can improve a little bit?

Yea

Ok! That's good! Do you think that your teachers believe that you will be successful one day?

Yea

Who's your favorite teacher?

Ms. Berritt

Why is she your favorite teacher?

Cause she pushes me a lot and... (pause)

How does she push you?

Like, when we do reading and stuff, like teach me and go hard and stuff.. uh and I have to take it.

Ok, why do you feel like you have to take it?

Cause the only way to get good grades is with hard work, like that.

Who is your least favorite teacher? It doesn't have to be this year.

Ms. Roberts, she used to yell.

How did that make you feel? How did she make you feel?

(long pause) Like, can you be quieter?

Do you feel like she cared about students?

Yes

What about Ms. Berritt? Do you think she cares about you?

Yea

Does she yell a lot?

(So-So Hand Signal)

Only when she needs to?

Yea, she don't really yell. Except for when she needs to, she will.

Ok, last question, if you could change anything about your school, your classroom, or your teachers, what would it be?

Discipline

<u>JUSTIN</u>

Time: 9:09

So tell me a little about yourself.

I love football. I like math, because you can learn more. I like reading so it can help me understand how to read. My favorite color is red. I'm 12 years old. My birthday is March the 24. I love my momma. I love my whole family. I love school. So I can get a degree and graduate. I love, uh, I love, I like to play football. I like to go.. I like to do stuff that I can do. I like my teachers.

Tell me what are your favorite things to do at school?

Recess, field trips, math and reading.

Ok, and what about at home? What is your favorite thing to do at home?

Play the game. Reading books. Go to sleep.

Tell me about one of your best days at school.

Field Trips

Give me a field trip that you went on that was like, oh this is amazing.

Uhm, to that football... I wanna go to Main Event.

Ok, oh that's the one that you guys on next week right?

Uh huh! Wednesday.

Oh, you went to that football game with all the boys?

Yes, oh the hawks the hawks.

Ok, alright, tell me about one of your best days at home. A day that you did not have to come to school.

Uhm, in the summertime. Going to the pool. Six Flags and White Waters.

Ok! Alright, how often do you feel like you teachers ask you about what you do at home, outside of school?

I play?

But do your teachers usually ask you about it?

No, sometimes, not all the times.

Ok, do you wish you could talk to them more about what you do outside of school?

No

Ok, so why is that?

I don't know.

How do you think your teachers help you learn?

They help me learn more to get me, get my work done, take MAP testing, and Georgia

Milestones.

Ok, what's your favorite subject? You already told me! You said its Math right? Now tell

me, what do you like about Math?

I like to multiply. I like my 2's, my 4's, but I don't know my 8's and my... and I know I know my

9's. I starting to learn to get my... I know my 10s, 10, 20, 30, 40, 50...

Cool! Now what makes you feel good about school?

So you can graduate and go to the next grade.

And that makes you feel good about school? Knowing that you can graduate?

Mmhm... and what frustrates you about school?

When I don't know the work, but then my teacher comes over and helps me.

Ok, what do you think you are the best at at school?

Uh, Reading

What do you think you are the best at outside of school?

Uhm, sleeping (giggles)

So what makes you good at reading?

Cause I like to read more. But, Ms... over the summer.. Ms. Wallace told me to go to the library and go get me some books.

And why do you like just sleeping at home?

Not just sleeping, I like to play my game. Cause on Saturdays, I get off my game at 8:00 and go to bed.

So tell me about your worst day at school.

When people be bullying me.

Ok, being bullied? Do a lot of people bully you often?

No, nobody. They be saying stuff. But I call them stuff back. But if they hit me, I'm gonna tell the teacher and then hit them back.

What's a subject that you don't like?

Reading, cause it be boring! No not reading, but writing, writing, writing. Because all the writing you do, you gotta write a lot and stuff. Like we like..... (long pause)

Ok, what do you think you could do better in?

I could do better in Math.

Ok, so you like math, but you know that you could do a little better?

(Nods)

What about at home, what is something that you don't feel like you're not really good at at home?

Washing the dishes. I started washing dishes last week.

How do you think you can improve in math?

I can improve more with my multiplication. In reading, I can improve more reading more events and understanding.

And do you believe that you can do that?

Mm-hm!

Good! Practice makes perfect! Do you think your teachers believe that you can be successful? Do you think they have always believe in you?

Successful? We learned about that yesterday! (inaudible) for middle school, they said "how you gonna be successful in Middle School…. Ms. Watson helped me.

So who's your favorite teacher?

Mr. Knox.

Why is he your favorite teacher?

Cause he like, he do more stuff than Ms. Smallwood. Cause sometimes we be talking about Mr. Knox in reading class and she be like, don't be talking about him like that.

How do you feel like he runs his classroom?

Good. Like if Ms. Smallwood take us to the computer lab, he'll let us do something with them.

So he's a little more interactive?

Mm-hm, like he keeps his desk clean.

Ok, who's your least favorite teacher?

What that mean?

It means, what's a teacher that you do not like too much... and it doesn't have to be a teacher from this year. It can be a teacher that you had in one of your previous grades.

Hmm... Art. Ms. Berry.

Yea? Why?

Cause she don't be letting us used her erasers. You can't bring no pencils in her classroom. Can't bring nothing. Ey, and some of her erasers, they be chewed up.

Do you feel like she cares about y'all though?

Mm-hm!

Ok, so last question, if you could change one thing about school, your classroom, or your teachers, what would it be?

My students.... my uh... classroom.

What would you change about it?

My teachers

Ok, what would you change about them?

I would make them more nice, every day.

How would you want them to be nicer?

Like, if someone get in trouble, they just tell them to stop. And some kids break it up so they can stop fighting.

Ok, anything else you would want to change?

I would make a new park.

A new park? Like the playground out here?

Yea!

Why?

It's messy.

<u>NATE</u>

Time: 21:54

Tell me about you. Who is Nathaniel Calloway?

Well... (long pause)

Like, how old are you? What grade you're in? What you like to do? Where you're from?

I'm 11, in the fourth grade. I'm from Ken Park. I like to play video games. Uhhh…

Anything else?

I'm a smart student, I like math, reading and… (long pause)

Okay..

Oh and I like sports..

Ok, tell me your favorite thing to do.

I like to play football.

Football, that's your favorite thing to do? Okay! Alright! Explain to me one of your best days at school.

One of my (pause) this, like this semester?

Yea, it could be this semester. (pause) Anytime that you feel like was your best day at school.

One of the best days of school that I had was like when I was in Mrs. Anderson's class. All the days was the best days in Mrs. Anderson's class.

Really? What made all the days the best days in her class?

Because like when we do work, it don't even feel like we're doing work. It feel like we doing something else, but we doing work actually. It's like, she make it look like we're having fun but we're also doing work at the same time.

Okay, so what does she do that makes it feel like you are having fun.

Well she like, uhm, she teach us like stuff, and then she make like uh… like she make us like.. She she, she really like.. I can't explain that, but…

Does she make it more like a game? Like uh… experience?

She make it like a game! Yea she make it like a game. Oh well.. She make it like 5 in this group, 5 in that group, then.. Switch over.. Then afterwards maybe you have computer time, like when we in centers, centers is better… but, like all the other days was better than like.... When we did centers it was kind of okay… but we used to like.. She used to let us get on the computer, on moby max… that used to be fun.. Like.. she used to let us get on front row.. She used to let us run around.. Her brain breaks was real fun, cause she like played games with us, she played uno with us, she let us see her phone, it was good.

So you felt like she wasn't just a teacher, she actually cared about y'all? Taking care of y'all? Making sure you all are learning and having a good time?

Yes

Okay! So tell me about a great day at home? Or your best day not at school.

My best day not at school was like.. It was last Saturday when me and some other students went to this place with our teacher, with Ms. Anderson and Ms. Allan.

Okay! Where did y'all go?

We had went to a festival. We was watching uhm Brooklyn, we were playing with her, she let us hold Brooklyn.

Who's Brooklyn? Oh Mrs. Anderson's daughter?

(Nods) She let us walk Brooklyn. I give Mrs. Anderson, Star's old clothes, like her old shoes and stuff that Star can't fit, because Brooklyn, Brooklyn, she can fit all of it. I give her clothes, shoes, hats, and... Mrs. Anderson she always… (pause)

Oh wow! Okay! That's nice! That's sweet! Ok, so how do you think Mrs. Anderson helps you learn?

She helps us learn like… cause *she*.. If we need help, she don't act like she don't… cause sometimes she might don't see you but then, you might think that she don't, you might think that she is just ignoring you, but she's not, because she be helping all the students around the class. And like, she she know, like if you raising your hand, she'll ask one of the other teachers cause

she taught us a lot. Mrs. Anderson.. I know Mrs. Anderson.. She work her best trying to get us

for fifth grade. So Mrs. Anderson, *she* helped other people, she make sure that we get our work

done, she goes around the classroom, "oh what did you miss on this?" and she let us go over it,

she gives us cards for it, and stuff like that.

So how often would you say Mrs. Anderson, or any other teacher asks you about your

home life? How you're doing at home? Like how they took you out for the weekend? How

often do you think they ask you about it?

Oh well, Mrs Anderson like… when we came to school on Monday, we would automatically

have to have a morning meeting to talk about like what we did on the weekends… and how we

played and what we did…

Okay so what is your favorite subject?

Math

Math is you favorite?

Yes, I like division

What makes you feel good about school?

The teachers!

How do the teachers make you feel good about school?

Because like they… because teachers they like.. They work so hard… and it's like… you have to do your part.. It like.. You can't do your part and then.. When they don't let you pass, then you wanna get mad. So, what I do? I do my part, so then the teachers don't have to be doing the whole part. So, and… Mrs. Anderson every morning, she'll give you a hug, she'll let you finish your breakfast.. But Mr. Harris, he just rush before you stop eating.

How does that make you feel?

It make me feel like he really don't care. Like he just want you to just start doing work immediately like, but Mrs. Anderson, she let you take your time eating and stuff.

So what frustrates you about school?

Students who… students like uhm… Precious or Kevin and Robert. They like to call people names… like fat chicken. They be messing with Alex.. and the "F" Word.. Yea…

Okay so kids that's just mean? Does the teacher do anything when the kids are mean?

Yes Mr. Harris, that's the only thing, like he'll be like.. He'll be serious but sometimes he'll try to make it fun too.. Like if they… like if Precious was to call me the "f" word or the "g" word, Mr. Harris would be like "Hey! How would you like it if he called you that? You'll be ready to fight!" And then he'll calm us down and stuff.

What do you think you are best at in school?

(pause) Doing my work.

Okay what makes you so good at doing your work?

Paying attention

Just paying attention? Ok! Alright! What do you think you are best at at home, or outside of school?

I'm best at listening to my grandma. And.. not talking back to her.

What about doing anything?

Mopping, cleaning, sweeping.. Helping my auntie with her baby Star.

Okay, and out of all of those things, what would they say, "oh yea! Nashawn is going to do that the best!" ?

Watch their baby.

Who else do you think know that you are good at watching kids and things like that?

Catherine

Are you guys related or is she just your neighbor?

She's just my neighbor, and really she like a sister to me. Cause when we first moved over here, Catherine, she like helped us move in and she started to meet us and stuff, and she know my grandma very well.

Ok! That's good! Okay, tell me about your worst day at school.

When I slapped Antonio.

Oh! Why? What happened with that?

Cause he had.. He was pushing on Madison and Madison mom told me that if someone hit

Madison to like… tell them to stop hitting her or something.. And he kept pushing her.. And she

was already… she was behind me… so then when he pushed her.. So then I had said hold on..

And then he pushed me and I pushed him back, then he slapped me and I slapped him back. And

that's where I messed up at. I should have told the teacher that he had hit me or put his hands on

me.

Tell me about a subject that you do not like.

Social Studies cause like, social studies like.. Sometimes it be too hard.

What do you think you are not good at in school?

I'm not good at… (pause) Math.

Do you think you are bad in math?

Kind of.

Why do you think you can do better in math?

Because sometimes, all my multiplication I don't know like that. So, I think I can get better at

my multiplication.

Now what about outside of school. What are some things that you don't feel like you are good at outside of school?

(pause) Playing Outside. Like playing baseball and soccer.

Do you think you can improve in that though?

Yes

How do you know?

Because when I started playing football, I wasn't that good. I just got better.

Does anyone else think that you are not good at that?

Bobby, he used to be my friend

Do you feel like your teachers believe that you will be successful one day?

Yes

What do you want to be when you grow up?

I want to be a football player. Or if not that, a lawyer or a teacher.

Why?

Because football, you can get a lot of money. Lawyer, you can save people's lives. And uhm, teacher you can also save kids lives. But like, you can help them learn and tell them stories about your childlife… and make them understand, 'oh I shouldn't do this or I shouldn't be this'

You told me who your favorite teacher is, give me one sentence on why she is your favorite teacher.

Because, she act like a mother to me.

In what ways does she act like a mother to you?

Like if I'm doing something wrong, she'll come to the other classroom and help me fix it. Or she'll be like "Ok Nashawn, you better stop!" and like my mom, she do the same thing. So.. that's why I would say that she's like a mom.

Who's your least favorite teacher?

Mr. Harris… no no not Mr. Harris... Uhm…. Ms. G-Jordan, because she was mean. Last year, she.. You know Joshua?.. She closed his hand in the door. Cause he.. She.. it was an accident though cause he was trying to get out the classroom cause he wanted to take a tab out. She said go take a tab out, but then, when he tried to close the door, she pushed it and then his hand got stuck in there. So then they had to stitch his finger back on.

So what made her mean? Other than that situation...

She used to like.. She didn't care about students.. She just used to talk about students any type of way. Like sometimes she used to talk to other teachers. She used to call students like the "B" Word. Not a female dog, but the other thing.

Bad?

No.

It was a curse word?

I think!

What else...

Like when you call a child something.

OOOh ok! I know what word you mean!

She used to cuss at people and stuff like that.

So, in all your years of school, have you always felt like your teachers care about you? Would you say you had more teachers that cared for you or less?

More, way more!

Ok! That's good to know. Ok last question. If you could change one things about your school, your classroom, or your teachers, what would it be?

It would be uhm..my teachers.

How?

I would put Ms. Anderson and Ms. Moore in my class and put Mr. Harris and Mr. Davis in Ms. Anderson class. So it would be men teachers with all the boys that's in there. Cause Tory, they don't listen to Mrs. Anderson or Ms. Allan.

So you think Male teachers with male students would be better? Who's class would you wanna be in?

I would wanna be in Ms. Anderson and Ms. Moore's class. Cause Mrs. Anderson knows that she could put me on point. Some kids don't listen and.. Sometimes when I go in her classroom to say hi, they're already acting up.

So how do you feel now that you have been placed in the other class?

I don't feel like I'm welcomed. Sometimes like when Precious and Robert and Kevin get mad, I don't feel like I'm welcome in their class. Cause they be calling people the f word and stuff like that.

So you don't think you're welcomed in the class by the students or by the teachers?

By the students.

Ok and do you feel like the teachers have your back or no?

Ms. Lee do.

APPENDIX C

<u>**ROUND 1: MEMORY WALK**</u>

A. DESCRIBE YOUR 3RD GRADE YEAR.

B. TEACHER NAME:

    I. TWO GOOD THINGS ABOUT THAT TEACHER

    II. TWO NOT SO GOOD THINGS ABOUT THAT TEACHER

C. WHAT DO YOU REMEMBER THE MOST ABOUT YOUR THIRD GRADE YEAR?

    I. HOW DID YOU FEEL ABOUT YOUR READING? MATH?

    II. DID YOU THINK THE WORK WAS EASY OR HARD? WHY?

    III. DID YOU THINK YOUR CLASS WAS FUN OR BORING? WHAT MADE IT THAT WAY?

D. HOW MANY STUDENTS WERE IN YOUR CLASS (APPROXIMATELY)?

    I. DO YOU FEEL LIKE YOU ALWAYS GOT THE HELP YOU NEEDED FROM THE TEACHER?

    II. WERE YOU EVER BULLIED? WHAT FOR?

E. DO YOU FEEL LIKE YOU WERE PREPARED FOR 4TH GRADE?

F. IF YOU COULD GO BACK IN TIME TO CHANGE ONE THING ABOUT YOUR 3RD GRADE YEAR, WHAT WOULD IT BE?

G. DRAW A PICTURE OF YOURSELF IN THIRD GRADE.

<u>Round 1 Memory Walk Transcripts</u>

Participants: Nate, Justin, & Kevin

Time: 17 minutes and 48 seconds

Well the first question is for you to describe your third-grade year. You don't have to write it, you can tell me. But, if you want to draw something about it, you can, that's why you have the paper there. Ok, I'm gonna start with Justin. Justin...

Justin: My third grade year, uhm... I had went to, uhm, McAuliffe*. My principal name... Mr.... he had... he had a bald head, I forgot his name..

Kevin: Mr. Brown*?

J: No not Mr. Brown. But uhm Mr.... I forgot. It was in Morristown*, by 34th Street*. I had fun. But, the principal, he had a ton of water and he jumped in the pool! We had fun.

Ok! What about your teachers?

J: My teacher, she was nice.

Ok! Tell me one good thing about her?

J: She used to understand. Like, she used to help us with our work if we didn't understand it.

Ok! Cool! Tell one thing that was not so good about her.

J: When she always call my mama!!!

What did she call your mama for?

J: Cause I kept getting in trouble.

For what?

J: For playing and fighting!

Ok! Alright. Tell me about your third grade year Nate*.

N: Ok... My third-grade year it was... awesome. Cause I uhm... the teacher... Ms. McDonald*,

uhm, she like... she was... she was a cool teacher.

Ok what made her cool?

N: Everything. She used to like, have competitions, she used to have like who got the best Jordan

outfit and stuff... we used to play a lot of games with her and stuff.

Ok, One not so good thing about her?

N: Uhm, she like.. she used to jone on kids.

Ok, what do you mean by "jone on kids"? Like seriously jone? or just playing around?

N: Serious jone. Like Dennis*... she used to be like (shakes head)

What would she say?

N: It was just mean.. she would be like.... he would be sleep and she'd be like "Big Boy wake up"
and then it be... she'd be like... something.. he slobbing or something... and then she'd jone him.

Wow, so he would fall asleep in class? What this here at this school?

N: Yes.

Ok, what about your third grade year?

K: So, my third grade year, my teacher was Ms. Warren*. She... like any time I need help or
something.. like she'll like call my parents for a conference... and she like... they'd be like,
"what's going on?" .. so... in third grade it would be like, if I need help... I wouldn't make A's and
B's but at the same time... (shrugs)

Ok, so tell me one good thing about her.

K: We.... (long pause) good thing is that she... she used to look pretty.. and bad thing about her...
I don't know one bad thing about her.

Alright so, what do you remember the most about third grade?

J: Field Day!! We had fun on field day!! We went outside!! Had a cookout!

N: Like what I remember... that I always had a teacher that cared about me.

Ok! Thats good! What about you Kevin?

K: Playing Kahoot!

What subject did you guys play it in?

K: When we had time like after lunch.

Do you feel like the work was easy or hard in third grade?

K: It was hard!

N: It was like... it was kinda hard but at the same time, easy. Medium!

J: It was easy!

What made it easy, Justin?

J: Cause you can understand and your teacher can help you... then you can understand the words

when she read the passage

Ok, and what made it medium for you?

N**:** Because sometimes, I won't understand and then, Ms. McDonald* will help me understand it.

Ok! (To Kevin) So you said it was hard! What made it hard for you?

K: Cause I couldn't get it. (Shrugs)

Alright so, how do you feel about your reading third grade year?

N: It was easy.

K: It was hard but it was alright

J: Easy

Ok, what made it so easy?

J: You can say the words, and if I didn't understand the words my teacher will help me.

To Kevin: What do you feel like made it hard for you?

K: That.. (pause).. like when we did reading she would like stay with a whole lot of us.

To Kevin: So she put everybody in groups?

K: Yea

What about math? Do you think Math was easy or hard?

N: Medium

J: It was easy you could just do the math book. Times Tables was kinda hard.

N: I agree with Justin, it was kinda hard.

K: I can't think about it. I can't think about how we did math.

To Nate: Why do you say medium?

N: Because like, when I like, didn't get it. Ms. McDonald, she used to help me.

To Nate: One on One or in a smaller group?

N: One on one sometimes

To Kevin: What about you?

K: Math? It was like (pause)... I don't know what it was like when we did hard math.

To Justin: What do you think made it hard?

J: Me? What made it hard was that... uhm.. i don't know... I forgot about the other grades.

So overall, do you think fifth grade was fun or boring?

J: It was fun cause field day, and cook out, and field trips.

So what do you think about it overall, when you actually had to do school work? Was it fun or boring?

J: Boring

(other students agree)

Ok, why do you all say boring?

J: Because, when you have to do class work that junk be boring. Then I don't get it, I just wanna go to sleep and go home.

Ok, so you said you didn't get it, you just wanna go to sleep and go home.

J: Yep

What did you feel about your classwork? Why do you feel like it was boring?

K: Cause like, we just have to sit around the class. And then, but she don't make it so fun.

What do you think would have made it more fun?

N: If she would of had put like... cared about like shoes and stuff... and games... and put it like....

like when we used to go over, like uhm, our ones, tens, hundreds, it was fun! Everything else

was boring.

Ok, how many students were in your class? Was it like how it is now?

N: It was a whoooole.... We had.. We had.. 23 students.

What about you Kevin? Did you guys have a lot of kids or no?

K: We had a lot of kids!

J: A lot of kids!

So, it's not the same as how it is here now? Ok, so how do y'all feel about having a lot of

kids in third grade compared to now?

(Nate and Justin start talking at the same time)

N: Now, Now.... cause in third grade...

J: Everybody was being so bad!!

N: You couldn't like, you couldn't focus because it would be kids like... in third grade over here...

it would be kids like... trying to make you laugh like David*.. he'll be like... (makes face) and all

like that and kinda make you laugh and stuff... but in this class, you only focusing on one side

and on the other side, they're doing their work... so you can't see what they doing and you can

stay focus.

What do you think Kevin?

Uh, it's a lot more easy for me now. Like, when the class separated, instead of just keep going to switching classes, we don't have to carry our stuff to different places.

What about you Justin?

My third-grade year.. it wasn't... I couldn't focus cause you couldn't understand the work and everybody kept laughing and stuff... but this year is fun because you can understand the work and after lunchtime you can switch over and go to math class.. And math you know it's finna be fun.

Ok, alright. So tell me this... were either of y'all ever bullied in third grade?

J: No!

N: No!

K: I don't get bullied!

Have you bullied anyone else when you were in third grade?

J: I'ma bully them back if they bully me!

What have you been bullied for?

J: Well, I fought somebody! And they started bullying me!

For what?

J: He had.. cause, we (cousins?), and he came around talking all that junk!

Ok, what junk? Tell me what the junk is!

J: Like cussing and stuff!

Well, what do they talk about?

J: They be like oh boy you look like a jackie hen(?)...boy your mama can't afford nothing.. so

I'ma get right with them...

Ok, what about you? Were you bullied or bullied anyone else?

N: Never bullied, never bullied anyone else. I never bully anyone if.... I ain't bully anybody else.

J: To Nate: You be bullying, Kate*!

N: Because in third grade nobody threatened me.

J: He was in third grade last year!!

N: I smushed somebody. Yea cause... Larry* (shrugs).

To Nate: Why?

N: Cause he was a big trash talker... but didn't wanna fight.

What he talk about?

N: He would talk about your mama. Say how you mama look like a "B" ... how your mama ugly,

how you're mama fat and stuff...

To Kevin: What do you say?

K: I don't bully nobody, nobody don't bully me.

Ok, I got two more questions. Do you feel like you were ready for the fourth grade?

J: Yea. I got a question about 5th grade. I think I was prepared for this fifth grade.

N/T: Yea

Ok cool! Last question. If you could go back in time, and go back to your third grade year.

What would you change?

J: I would change the school!

Why?

Because it be dirty and stuff, rats coming in. I would change the park (turns around) look at this

park, this park not clean.

OK! What would you change Kevin?

I'll change... the students.

Ok, why?

Cause they just being bad! Like.... (long pause)

To N: Ok, and what about you?

N: I would change... I wouldn't change anything... I would change... how the students think and how they talk to the teachers... that's the only thing.

APPENDIX D

Round 2: Disability

1. WHAT IS MOST IMPORTANT TO YOU ABOUT SCHOOL?

2. WHAT IS MOST IMPORTANT TO YOU OUTSIDE OF SCHOOL?

3. IF YOU HAD TO CHOOSE BETWEEN A TEACHER THAT CARED ABOUT YOU, BUT NEVER TAUGHT YOU ANYTHING AND A TEACHER THAT TAUGHT YOU EVERYTHING BUT DIDN'T REALLY CARE ABOUT YOU, WHICH ONE WOULD YOU CHOOSE? WHY?

4. DO YOU FEEL LIKE SCHOOL IS EASY OR HARD? WHY?

5. CAN YOU TELL ME THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SOMEONE TEACHING YOU SOMETHING NEW AT HOME OR OUTSIDE OF SCHOOL, AND YOUR TEACHERS TEACHING YOU SOMETHING NEW IN SCHOOL?

6. WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN YOU BECOME FRUSTRATED WHILE LEARNING? IS IT THE SAME AT SCHOOL AND AT HOME?

7. DO YOU KNOW WHAT A DISABILITY IS?

8. DO YOU THINK THAT YOU HAVE A DISABILITY? WHY OR WHY NOT?

9. DO YOU KNOW WHAT A LEARNING DISABILITY IS?

10. WOULD YOU SAY THAT YOU HAVE A LEARNING DISABILITY? HOW DO YOU KNOW?

11. HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT TESTING (IE. MILESTONES, F&P, INTERIMS, ETC.)?

Round 2: Disability Transcripts
Participant: Nate

Time: 7:09

Researcher: Alright, first question. What is most important to you about school?

Nathaniel: My education.

Ok! Alright, and what about outside of school?

My friends.

Ok, so when you say your education, what about your education is most important?

Like... (long pause) like how... cause cause in school... the teachers are getting you ready for next

year.. so my education is like.... uhm... (Shrugs)

Ok.. well that's good! Ok, so if you had to choose between a teacher that cared about you

and never taught you anything and a teacher that taught you everything, but didn't really

care about you, which one would you choose?

(long pause) I would choose the teacher that didn't care about me.

But taught you everything? Why?

Because if I was to choose a teacher who cared about me but didn't teach me anything, and we in

school... I wouldn't be learning anything... but if… (pause) I'm fine with a teacher who don't care

about me.. but helps me with my work and stuff so I can get to the next grade... so that when I be

a grown up I can go to college... well as a teenager I can go to college... and then get my college degree and stuff like that and then, get a job!

Ok, do you feel like school is easy or hard... in general?

Easy

Easy? Why do you think it's easy?

Because all you're doing is listening to the teacher... doing your work... and won't nothing happen.

Ok, can you tell me the difference between someone teaching you something new at home, or outside of school, and someone teaching you something new at school?

Uhm, stuff that they teach me inside my house... It's like, my mom, cause she teach me a lot of things... but it's like stuff like if I try to get kidnapped or something like that... it's not... sometimes it's educational stuff like Math, homework, stuff like that. But stuff outside of school....

Like washing dishes, or...

Washing clothes?

Yea washing clothes! How does she teach you how to do that?

All she do is tell me to make sure I put half a cup of tide in the clothes... put the clothes on... something... and you twist the thing and then you press the other thing so it could start going.

Then when it go, and then when the clothes get finished washing, put them in the dryer, put them

to very dry and then press it and then... that's it!

So did she show you or just tell you?

She showed me.

Ok! So what do you do when you become frustrated while learning… when you're learning

something new and you get frustrated like man this is hard! What do you do?

I'll say... Oh my God! and Can you help me? and I give up!

Ok! Is it the same at school and at home?

No

Ok, what's different?

Because at home when I'm learning something... it's not that hard because you get to... well

actually it's like the same but at home they walk it through... like my mom she walked me

through the stuff like... she just don't be like *(mimics teacher in high pitched tone)* "oh.. let me

write this little problem on the board and let you copy that." She don't do that. My momma, she

like she'll stand there for a minute and watch you do it so then when I do it I just get better at it...

Then she'll be like "Oh Okay, You got it!" But at school, they… Mr. Clarke, he'll like just write

it on the thing and then give you one problem and then think that you posed to learn it by

yourself.

Ok. Do you know what a disability is?

Uhm... like something that you can't do.

Ok, give me an example.

Like my cousin Slade, she uhm, she's Autism, so she has a disability. She can't talk like how

other people do.

Ok, so do you think you have a disability?

No

Ok! Do you know what a learning disability is?

When you learn behavior

Ok do you think you have a learning disability? Or anyone around you?

Anthony.

Anthony, why'd you say Anthony?

Cause Anthony just like to play he don't try to do his work, Anthony just play around.

Ok, how do you feel about testing? Like Milestones, MAP, F&P, interims... What do you

think about it?

It was good.

Yea? You like taking tests?

No

Ok! Why not?

Cause you gotta get prepared and some stuff don't be prepared just like how we was taking the

MAP and half the computers wasn't uhm charged... so then we had to use desktops and stuff like

that. We have to be ready and stuff like that but even the principal and stuff like that not even

ready to take it.

Focus Group Round 2: Ability

Participants: Justin, Kevin, and Tasha*

Time 15:57

Researcher: What is the most important thing to you guys about school?

Tasha: Kevin go first!

Kevin: Aight so, the most important thing about school is my grades.

So you said the most important thing to you about school is your grades? Ok! Tasha what

do you think?

Tasha: Uhm, my grades.

(To Justin) **Okay what about you? Your grades too?**

Justin(J): My teacher and my grades.

Your teacher and your grades? Why did you include your teachers?

J: Because they smart, and they tell us... they get us ready for sixth grade.

(To Justin) **So it's important to you to have a good teacher?**

Justin: Mm-hm

What's a good teacher to you?

J: Like a nice teacher like Mr. Knowles. Like he nice, but like Ms. Smith... if she take the other class to the computer lab, she'll take us first, but like Mr. Knowles he'll let us go to the computer lab with him but sometimes sometimes we go to the computer lab with them... but sometimes both of us go to the computer lab... but Ms. Smith, she nice.. and Ms... uh.. like last time.. what happened... oh yea like... mm... last time she was nice.. all the time Mr. Knowles and Ms. Smith

{Notorious Student barges into the room looking for another teacher and loudly exclaims "Dang bruh, where Mr. Parks!" Justin pauses at the interruption, pursed his lips, and audibly makes an annoyed "prrft" sound before continuing with his statement."}

J: They both nice.

Ok, so next question is, what is the most important thing to you outside of school?

J: My family

Tasha: Same thing

Kevin: I'd say, my family and basketball

(To Kevin) **Ok, so why is basketball important to you?**

Kevin: Cause I wanna be in the NBA... and... my family I want them to survive their life like when I'm growing up.

So, what makes family so important to you guys?

J: Because.....

Tasha: They help us! They help us!

J: Say they get hurt and stuff like... if they get hurt, I'm going to go to the hospital and so they can help with stuff... like feelings... go to work... pay the bills...

Tasha: Yea cause they help us with different things that we can not help ourselves with.

Oh! Good... what do you think Kevin?

J: When you go to graduation, when you graduate, like my mama, she gonna come to my... like.. when I'm in college.. they'll help us graduate and stuff.

Ok.. so if you had to choose between a teacher that cared about you and never taught you anything but you know they cared about you, and a teacher who taught you everything you needed to know, but didn't care about you, which one would you choose?

Tasha: The second.... Because you can't be dumb!!!

Everyone laughs

Ok!

J: Cause the teacher, she care about you but she don't know about your stuff. But I would want to tell her everything.

What do you think Kevin?

K: Somebody that taught me and didn't care about me, because I wouldn't care if they didn't care about me just long as they help me...

Ok cool... next question, do you feel like school is easy or hard in general?

J: I think it's hard because... I don't know.. I think its hard because you can understand the work but at the same time you can get help for it.

Ok, who do you usually get help from?

From Mr. Knowles.. no from Ms. Smith class, cause I'm in her class first. And from Ms. Smith and some of my classmates.

(To Tasha) **Ok, what do you think?**

Tasha: Uh, In the middle.

In the middle, why in the middle?

Tasha: Because... like when you don't get things but you do.. cause you could uhm... find a way to understand it.. so our teacher tell us, like first try to help yourself before asking anybody else... so yea that's what we do...

Do you think that school is easy or hard?

K: Oh yea, I think school, it depends on what we are learning on.

Ok, so can you tell me the difference between someone teaching you something at home and at school.

Tasha: So at home.. you need home training!

What's the difference between somebody teaching you something at home and somebody teaching you something at school?

J: It's a difference because at home you can know what to do, but at school at the same time you could have home training, but at the school you can't have school training but you can understand the work and stuff.

Tasha: I say home training because home training is school training too because you have to know how to like use manners and stuff. The same home training you use at home is the same home training you use at school.

Good point! What do you think?

K: You, uhm... At home, cause you have to learn how to become a person before you come to

school.. like... you have to learn home training... and how to... treat people right.

Ok! Now what about learning something new at home... like you learning how to cook...

you learning basketball.. and what's something that you do at home.

J: I play my games!

Ok, so you learn how to play a new game. How do you learn that at home that's different

from how you learn your math and reading at school?

J: I... I read. I take the game out right.. put the game in...follow the directions, I read the paper

and then I start learning how to play it.

Ok, does anyone come and help you or show you how to play?

Yes. Like when I first got online like my cousin, she help me sign in.

So, how did she show you how to sign in?

She put in the e-mail and then the password..

And now you know how to do it for yourself?

Mm-hmn

Ok and you learned by just watching her or did she show you how to do it?

J: She showed me how to do it.

(To Tasha) **What about you? How about your cooking? How did you learn in comparison to school?**

Tasha: My mom showed me an example of how to do it and I've been getting better at it. Now I know how to cook French Toast.

(To Kevin) **Okay, now basketball. So you're learning a brand new play, what's the best way for you to learn that play?**

K: Somebody to help me. Somebody to see me getting it at the same time and we doing it over and over again.

Ok.. so what do you do when you because frustrated with learning? Like... man this is hard! ...Outside of school or in school?

Tasha: I use the calm down stuff that my teacher taught us. Uhm, in second step we use the breathe countdown and breathe through our nose and breathe out our mouth, and then use self-talk.... or talk to a teacher or friend.

Ok! That's good..

J: Mmmm... What you say?

What do you do when you get frustrated when you are trying to learn something new?

J: Oh you can.. we can like... so if you get... sorry so say for instance, we get into a fight... so say for instance we're fighting.... and then they will... hold up.. so in ELA for math... after... so like today we got Mr. Knowles right.. so for instance... we go in his classroom... we listen to this thing say walk... and then you can name your feelings (*singing:* calm down...) then that's in fourth grade.. it start *name you feelings, calm down* so you can stop.. then you can name your feelings.. then you can *calm down..*

What about you Kevin?

K: I just take a moment and I just sit down and think about some things. Ok.

Ok so you guys sound like you guys get calm and try to center yourselves. Ok!

Alright next question. Do you know what a disability is?

J: No

Tasha: I don't know what that is.

Kevin: Home Training or something?

Tasha: What's disability?

Disability is like when someone can not do something in particular. They are not able.

Tasha: Like someone who needs help? If we were disability?

Well, I first just wanted to know if you knew what it was.

Tasha: So a disability is like when someone can't do what everybody else can do... like they can't do everything but they can do somethings.

Ok! Good... so give me an example.

Tasha: Uhm like, so say for instance, if uhm...anybody... imagine that person and they have like... uhm.. had like an injury.. and they like messed up they brain or something.. and we have to reset.. they have to over think things like this girl... she was on the news and she had got hit in the head by her brother with a bat.. a metal bat.. they was playing inside baseball and had hit head and it messed up her brain so she had to rethink... uhm relearn everything..

J: I don't know what disability to mean but I think it mean that when somebody else trying to do the same thing as the other person but the other person can't do it.

Ok.. What do you think Kevin? You want to add something to it?

K: Disability mean like... I try to help.. like.. me.. I think disability means... (long pause) Someone that think that.. that can't control themselves..

So.. do any of you think you have a disability?

J: I think no because…

Tasha: I got asthma.

J: Hold up.. sometimes when I be.. sometimes when somebody else do something I might do it...

but I might.. it's not like a bad way...

What about you Tasha? You started talking about asthma?

Tasha: Yea, I got asthma.. Me and Kevin got asthma. And when we in the uhm... in the first or

second weeks, we have the same issues. I have allergies, asthma, and breakouts.

Ok, so you also look at it as things you can't really control. Ok, do you know what a

learning disability is?

Tasha: oh! Like when you don't know certain things like uhm.... something that hasn't been

taught.

Kevin: Or you haven't been learning... or if someone needs help.

J: What she say the question was?

I said, do you know what a learning disability is?

J: I think it mean.. What a learning disability is? I think a learning disability is... when somebody

need help... and then can... first the teacher will solve a problem out on the board... and then you

can understand how to do it.

Ok, would you say that either one of you have a disability? Would you say that you have

one?

J: No, I mean yes....

Ok, why do you say yes?

J: Because... I sometimes... uh.. when I don't know the work, the teacher she gonna, I mean he gonna.. he or she... they gonna solve the problem out and then, I understand the work.

Ok, what about you Tasha?

Tasha: Uhm.. like certain things uhm.. like uhm.. certain things I don't get because like uhm.. if I don't get it I make it a joke.. so like uhm.. one of my friends Anya*.. she asked me uhm... where did I live.. and then I said I moved... and she was like how you know where you live at? I said cause I moved and then I just started laughing because I'm silly like that.

K: A learning disability? Like.. do it have something that mean with learning? So... learning plays in basketball... I think I can learn plays more... like I said doing it over again and I could just keep getting it cause when I do it.. it be easy.. in the game..

Ok last question for Round 2. How do you feel about testing? Milestones? F&P? Interims?

J: Map testing! I think... first.. this what I think. I think that I may be feel.. Com..pared?

Tasha: Prepared?

J: Yea, prepared for testing then at the same time.. I feel like you can understand the work... you can start on the test you can log in. You can read the questions over and over... how many times you want to.. and then you can understand the question and what they talking about.

How do you feel about it?

Tasha: I don't really feel nothing because the stuff that's on the Milestones and the Map test, we've already learned. Like back in the past... but, uhm, some stuff that we didn't learn... we already knew because our teacher Ms. Walker.. when we do math we have a little chart that we write down letters... and she'll look at our notes. It's not like our answer sheet, it's just like telling us how to.. what's the steps.. but mostly in reading and math we already know what do to.. so like our teachers at this time.. we doing the review.. we already did it.. so we can know better because our teacher want all of us to pass.

How do you feel about testing Mr. Cool?

How I feel about testing? I don't know. I think it's going to be hard for me... because when I see it and when I get an A. I'm proud of myself.

Ok. SO if y'all had to a choice to not test anymore.. if you had a choice between taking all these test and not which one will you prefer?

Tasha and Justin: Take the tests.

Tasha: You gotta take them to go to college

J: You gotta get your degree.

K: And you gotta get to sixth grade.

APPENDIX E

ROUND 3: RACE

1. HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT BEING BLACK?

2. WHAT ARE SOME THINGS YOUR PARENTS OR GUARDIANS HAVE TOLD YOU ABOUT BEING BLACK?

3. *SHOW PICTURE OF WHITE CHILD AND BLACK CHILD*

   A.   WHICH CHILD DO YOU THINK IS SMARTER? WHY?

4. WOULD YOU RATHER ATTEND A SCHOOL WITH MOSTLY BLACK STUDENTS OR WHITE STUDENTS? WHY?

5. WOULD YOU PREFER TO HAVE A BLACK TEACHER OR A WHITE TEACHER? WHY?

6. DO YOU THINK BEING BLACK AFFECTS YOUR EDUCATION?

7. IF YOU WITHDREW AND WHEN TO A SCHOOL WITH MOSTLY WHITE STUDENTS, HOW DO YOU THINK YOU WOULD FEEL? HOW DO YOU THINK YOU WOULD FEEL?

8. DO YOU THINK DISCIPLINE WOULD STILL BE A CONCERN AT A SCHOOL WITH MAJORITY WHITE CHILDREN? WHY?

9. DO YOU THINK YOU WOULD LEARN MORE? WHY?

<u>Round 3: Race Transcripts</u>

Participants: Nate

Time: 5:50

Researcher: Now we're gonna get a little deep. What's race?

Nathaniel: Race in like our writing? Or Race in like the color of our skin?

Race like the color of our skin.

Nathaniel exhales loudly and grabs his stomach

What did you hold your stomach?

Shrugs and smilies

Ok, well first question. How do you feel about being Black?

Good.

Why do you feel good? What makes you feel good about being Black?

Because I can learn about my history, and I got, uhm African-American uhm.. ancestors who

fought in the freedom rights and uhm stuff like that... Like Frederick Douglass and how he

escaped from being a slave and how he learned how to read when he was like only 7, or 9, or 8

years old... and Harriet Tubman who led the uhm.. Underground Railroad, and uhm Martin

Luther King and Malcolm X.... and Rosa Parks.

So, what are somethings that you hear your parents, guardians, and older people around you saying about being Black?

That white people try to steal your money. My mom.. she be saying... *(laughs)* you do not wanna hear my momma talk about White people. But my grandma... she keep thinking that... White people like Donald Trump gonna send all the Black people to different countries... and stuff like that.. and cause my grandma... she... cause it is nice houses in our neighborhood that's just now getting built.. like real big nice houses but it says no…. it says at the bottom it's real small... it says... no black people can buy!

Really?

Yep!

Wow! So if you were to look at a picture of a Black kid and a White kid, which kid would you think is smarter?

Both, I don't judge people.

Alright, would you prefer to go to a school with mostly White students or Black students?

Black students, because some White students... they drop people and stuff.. I don't... Cause I'll mess around and beat up a White person.

Oh lord! Have you ever gone to school with any White people?

It was a boy named Jordan. He used to bully Black people talking about some, "Oh my dad is a police officer so he can arrest you." My grandma got on him real good.

Ok so then the next question is, would you prefer to have a Black teacher or a White teacher?

I'd prefer to have a Black teacher.

Ok Why?

Because my grandma said, some white teachers really don't care about Black students... cause they have their own ways... so they think.. cause they think... just because they grown that they can have their own way with students and "Oh, like..." say side stuff.

Ok, so do you think being Black affects your education at all?

Nope!

If you were to withdraw from Gideons today and go to a school where there were mostly White students, how do you think you would feel?

I think.. I'd feel like... *(pause)* I need to go to a different school with mostly Black people and Black teachers.

Ok, why is that?

Because, if I go to a White school.. I don't know what I might be capable of.. somebody might get hurt.

Why?

Because, I don't like when White folks wanna call people N words and stuff.

Do you think discipline would be the same concern?

I think it would be worse there!

Do you think you'd learn more?

Nope.

Why is that?

Because sometimes if I'm around to many White people I start to get nervous.

Ok.. what makes you nervous?

Everything. The way they lookin at you and the way they smell.

Focus Group Round 3 Transcripts: Race

Participants: Justin, Tasha, Kevin*

16:10

Researcher: Alright, so now we are gonna start talking about Race a little bit.

Justin (J): I think I know what Race means. Race means.. it's like.. when you RACE the passage

and then... yesterday we took a test and Ms. Smith... like, you can ask a question... like Ms.

Smith, yesterday we took an exit ticket... and Ms. Smith said use RACE for number 8 and

number 9 and number 10... so we had RACE like we ask a question.. and uhm…

Tasha: I think what she meant by Race was different colors like.. people skin tones.. we learned

about races... like we learned about Moses, that's Harriet Tubman, we read the book... our

teacher read us a book about it and it's called uhm Moses... and she was uhm forced to do things

she didn't want to do like things that's not like right good for you... so she was uhm forced to do

like uhm.. planting like uhm.... gardening and stuff... like she didn't wanna do it... and then they

put her in a what's it called... tunnel.. like a tunnel.. and when she was down there they poured

cold ice water on her... but she was like cold and it's freezing cause there was like nothing down

there... just dirt and water..

J: OOH you talking about that!

Tasha: Then uhm, the revolution changed by uhm... people uhm fighting back.. and people

coming together.

J: I thought she was talking about the other one.

Kevin (K), what do you know about Race?

K: Yea I knew you were talking about Black and White at the same time!

How do you feel about being Black?

J: I feel happy because... if somebody else call me Black and they Black and they know they

Black... but if it's a person that's White, they call me Black, they being racist.. like... if a person

Black and they call their own self Black... they call they own community Black... and they

calling the person Black that look Black already.

Tasha, how do you feel?

Tasha:I feel okay because everybody is different! Everybody is different and they were born in

different ways. Everybody has different skills. It don't matter what people say about you. It just

they know that you are smart and intelligent. So, that's why they probably just hate.

K: I feel happy that I'm Black because, people already making issues that White people are

racist, already and plus... I don't wanna talk like White people.

Ok, what do you mean when you say you don't want to talk like White people?

K: Like, they talk like.. kinda babyish..

Tasha: They be talking crazy... because... any words that come out of their mouth is just nothing.

Some White people.. Some not. Some don't like racism.

Kevin: I was playing this game with this White person yesterday and he just just get saying stuff

and I was like... (pause) Ok…

J: I was finna say that if you call somebody racist then you call yourself racist too. But at the same time... if somebody else call me... like one time... that I was playing with my friends... and this boy... he was White... he talking about "Oh! Can I play with y'all?" and my friends said no, but I said, "You can play" but then he started calling people... "Oh you Black!" and stuff and he started being racist and I was like, "Why you being racist?" We were playing hide and go seek.... and I have one question. What if uhm, have somebody called you uhm... a person that's mean... have they called you White?

White?

J: No, Black! Like a White person ever been racist to you before?

Yes.

Kevin: Why do people say we are African? Like...

African-American? Because your ancestors are from Africa, they say, African - American.

Tasha: I really think my friend is from Africa, cause I always ask her if she is African and if she was born in Africa because she looks like an African to me.

J: Like Tasha…. I think she light skin but she still got some Black in her.

Yea, Black comes in all different kinds of shades.

J: But if she called somebody Black, she'd be racist.

Ok, picture in your head, a Black boy and a White boy. Who do you think is going to be smarter?

Tasha: Black

J: I think not the White boy because they might don't know the work. But I think the Black boy because he understand the work and he ask his teacher for help like the White boy he might just cheat off of somebody or ask his friend like can you help me? And if his friend says no he will cheat.

Tasha: For example, most people say White because uhm back in the day Blacks had to sneak and learn but uhm... the Whites they could just learn right like that... but now the Blacks become stronger and now they take cover because, uhm, they're learning, they in school now, and they learn that some Whites uhm.. apologized... some of them! But the Whites.. I wouldn't say they are smarter but like equal…

J: Equal! Yep!

What do you think Kevin?

I think White people don't... I don't wanna say they don't know nothing... but they like bully and stuff... like in movies.. it's like.. they... if they talk to us like that... it was like... gotta go bananas on them...

So, would you prefer to have a Black teacher or a White teacher?

All students: Uhm…

J: I had a White teacher named Ms. U*.

K: I had a White teacher before she was nice!

J: I would prefer both because... like say for instance Ms. Smith is a White lady and Mr. Knowles is a Black lady... I'm not trying to be racist but they could split up.. the children can split up into groups into two groups... and some of the white side go with the white side and then the other side go with the Black side.... so some of the White AND the Black could go with the White side.... *(gives up explaining his point)* I don't care cause once the teacher know what to do and understand the work.

(To Tasha) Ok.. what do you think?

Tasha: I think it's not fair because uhm... let's say I picked the Black teacher... but the White teacher would feel sad like, "Oh that person doesn't like me!" so you can't make both of them feel like you don't like them so you have to be fair and equal... so you gotta make both of them feel like they are wanted. Like Ms. George* is White and Ms. Williams* is Black but they both still are friends. They wouldn't make each other feel bad cause that's what they teach us about. They say different colors, well they don't say White, they don't be racist, they say if a different person come in the classroom, you still have to treat them how you treat the others.

What do you think Kevin?

K: *(long pause)* Uhm.. I don't know

Ok. That's okay. Do you think being Black affects your education?

Kevin: No

Tasha: No

J: I think like.... No

Ok, if you withdrew from Glenhouse and transferred to a school with mostly White students, how do you think you would feel?

Tasha: Uncomfortable

J: Like my cousin, she is in 10th grade and she go to a school with... she go to a school called Dogwood. And Dogwood Glen, that's where she used to live and but she don't live there no more... she live in Atlanta but she still go over there.. she go to that school... it's a lot of people.. it's White. It's like Black people and White people, but they be racist over there like they don't want... like one Black girl was on the cheerleading team, and one Black girl was on the cheerleading team and then all the other ones, they didn't want to take the picture with the Black girl because.... because she Black.. so but... I'd feel uncomfortable because they're all White and I'd be scared.

Ok, what would you be scared of?

J: Because they might try to do something to me. Or they might wanna try to fight you or bully you because if I'm the only Black person, I'd be scared... I'd ask my momma can I go to a new school.

(To Tasha) Ok, so you said uncomfortable? Why would you feel uncomfortable Tasha?

Tasha: At first I would feel uncomfortable because some White people like... even if you try to be their friend... they'll like punk you.

Punch you?

Tasha: No like PUNK you! Like I seen something on TV, like they put a boy in a ballroom… and… (pause)

Oh like pranks?!

Tasha: Mmhmn

Oh, I see what you're talking about.

Tasha: I'll probably feel uncomfortable just a little bit because uhm... I have an uhm... well she not White but I call her White because I have a best friend and she's like really light. Like she's like Alice's* color... but like lighter...and I call her uhm... I be thinking she White... I be like I have a White friend and they be like, she's not White... I mean she's White cause she kinda lighter... but uhm I'll say everybody is different...but if some... other kids doesn't like you for who you is, you just should uhm ignore it because uhm when they get bullied, they gonna need

your help...but I wouldn't want to help them cause they didn't help me when I was being bullied so...

Kevin, what about you?

K: I ain't gonna feel scared.

Ok, so how would you feel?

I'd feel happy.

Ok, why?

Cause I'd get to meet new people.

Ok! Alright! Do you think discipline will still be a concern at school with mostly White children? Cause discipline is something that you all talked about in your individual interviews. Kids acting up and things like that. Do you think it would be the same?

J: I think it might be the same thing because White people they might act up at up at the same things. They might... a Black person, if a Black person fight right... The White people are gonna act like the same person doing stuff.. but I think it's really yeah because... a White person and a Black person fight right and then the White person is gonna try to jump in and help his friend... I mean... I ain't gonna be... I mean a person... a person... a color and a color fight and he gonna try to jump in... and then the Black person gonna start being bad and start calling... they gonna go to detention.. but they gonna believe it's the Black person.

Ok, alright, who's next?

Tasha: Discipline for them? I wouldn't want anyone to feel bad for what they did. For instance, make they stay somewhere like in the center and Black people look at them crazy cause they look at us crazy like we're a piece of trash. But they wouldn't want anyone else to look at them like their a piece of trash. Cause we treat them with kindness and uhm... my grandaddy is like... White. so... yea….

What about you Kevin?

K: I'll move to another school.

Ok last question for this section. If you were to withdraw and go to a school with mostly White students.. do you think you would learn more than you learn here?

J: I think no because the more that we learn here, the more that we get more education. At the other school I think no because the one that people be acting bad and be crazy and stuff is the same how some people do here. But some people don't because we get more education and more work done.

Tasha: I think it would be a horrible experience because they probably like... if we like different colors.. some people still think we racist too.. White people. But I think it would be too much pressure on you like other schools, like this school, they don't put pressure. They help you take your time... but other schools they just like put pressure on you like.. hurry up, do this do that... get it right!... something like that...

Ok, what do you think Kevin?

K: Uhm, I wouldn't learn more... well, I would if I don't still like... in another grade when I'm in

fifth... because I'm leaving... so...

APPENDIX F

ROUND 4: ECONOMIC STATUS

1. HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT LIVING IN THIS NEIGHBORHOOD?

2. DO YOU THINK LIVING IN THIS NEIGHBORHOOD AFFECTS YOUR EDUCATION?

3. *SHOW PIC OF "WELL-DRESSED" BLACK CHILD AND "POORLY-DRESSED" BLACK CHILD*

   A.   WHICH CHILD DO YOU THINK IS SMARTER? WHY?

4. IF SOMEONE PAID YOU $1,000,000 TO CHANGE YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD, WHAT WOULD YOU CHANGE?

5. IF SOMEONE PAID YOU ANOTHER $1,000,000 TO CHANGE THE SCHOOL IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD, WHAT WOULD YOU CHANGE?

6. WHAT WOULD YOU DO IF SOMEONE GAVE YOUR PARENTS $1,000,000? WHAT DO YOU THINK YOUR PARENTS WOULD DO?

Round 4: Economics Transcripts

Participant: Nate

Time 6:10

Alright, now we're going to talk about the neighborhood. There are only six questions.

How do you feel about living in this neighborhood?

I don't like it.

Why not?

Because kids steal bikes. I mean they see you with a bike, they assume it's theirs but.... it's not..
Cause one time it was Carol.. Carol had a... Carol momma had just bought her this bike and it
was this boy named Darius Cooley and Tremaine. They used to go to this school last year...
when Mr. Berger was here. So... they walked up to Carol,"Oh! How you get my little cousin
bike?" and then she said, "This not your cousin bike!" and then they said "Yes it is!" and then she
said, "You wanna go ask my dad?" and then they said "Nah, just hop up off the bike!" ...I told... I
was finna fight them but Carol said don't do it because my dad got a lot of money.. their dad...
they parents may don't have that much money.

**Ok... Alright! Do you think living in this neighborhood affects your education? Like your
school and how your school is set up?**

(long pause) Yea...

Ok how?

Cause... (long pause) cause like when I'm not in school I hear how some parents talk about how the parents be touching they children like pushing them and stuff and I hear like how the, uhm, fathers wanna talk about how they gonna shoot the school up and stuff...

Wow! Why would they want to do that?

It might be because last year, cause last year i don't know if the teachers this year heard about it, but it used to be this lady... Ms. G. Jordan and Ms. Longitude. Ms. G. Jordan used to call kids N words and they used to go home and tell they parents.

Oh wow! So the parents used to be upset about that?

Yep. And the B word... like if you don't have a dad and they call you that... and one day a dad came up here and... confirmed that she didn't need to be saying that... but after that.. she didn't... she did say it... but when my dad came up here it was like... she just... automatically just stop saying that. My dad do got a lot of muscles because he's a body builder... so... it was this... a man came up here with a gun and was finna shoot the school!

Wow!

Because of her... and Ms. Olatalo wanted to sit on people's kids!

Seriously? Wow! Ok! If someone paid you a million dollars to change your neighborhood what would you change?

I would change... Uhm... I would change that... in my neighborhood that... All Black people had to get a house that was fixed and had free clothes with food... and that all churches was

upgraded.. and fixed and stuff... and that my grandma had a house with all downstairs... in a big house...

Anything Else?

And that all dogs had to be cleaned every Saturday.

Alright! So if someone paid you another million dollars to change the school, this school, what would you change?

I would change the Wi-Fi. I would change the desks. I would change the like... I would change the materials... and what else... the closets that be in room.. I would change the Pre-K room. You know how they have the little... like they don't have a door. I would put a door there. Because then... if somebody do come like and try to shoot the school and then they come into the school, they don't have nowhere to... I think they be hiding but I would like for the Pre-K students to have a door because I have a little cousin named Michayla and she said she be scared sometimes because she don't know if they could just come in just start shooting all the kids who don't have a door in their class. Cause, that's dangerous... But they making a new school so then they can make real classes and stuff.

Yea! Alright last question! If someone gave your parents one million dollars, what do you think your parents would do?

I think... cause... my mom... I think... cause my mom... I think she'll buy a new phone for me and my sister and her... and... upgrade her house.. and then like.. take us out to eat... give some of the homeless about $20... and get my grandma a new wheelchair... and furniture...

Round 4: Economics Transcripts

Participants: Justin, Tasha, and Kevin

Time: 10:12

Researcher: Ok, this round only has six questions! First one, how do you feel about living in this neighborhood?

Justin (J): I think I feel... No, because... (pause)

What do you mean when you say no?

J: I think I feel bad because violence be going on, shootings, prostitute be... and stuff... they be shooting and stuff... they be going in abandoned houses... police be riding around... people be going to jail...

T: I don't know how I feel about this community but I'll say... people born in different ways... but I think it's just too much violence going on.. too much shooting... and I just want everybody to get along.

Ok, what do you think Kevin?

K: I like the community because there are more people over here. And, when I moved over here it was like more fun and I get to see new people. Now, I know where they live.

Ok, do you think living in this neighborhood affects your education? So you talked about violence a little bit, do you think that affects how you learn and how the kids around you learn?

J: Yea

T: Yea, it affects us because last time we had a lockdown and for instance they'll say lock down because people around the school making violence... and trying to break-in and shoot... so you have to protect yourself.

Ok, what do you think Kevin?

K: Mm.. yea.. cause of the violence... and it get the kids messed up in the head because like... kids stealing cars now in this neighborhood.

J: I think I feel... yes, because... the violence... I think I feel happy because when the violence stop going on.. you can get more education and work done...

(Justin interjects with off-topic story. He is getting antsy. He is given the rolling chair to sit in.)

Ok, next one. If someone paid you a million dollars to change the neighborhood, what would you change?

J: I would change the school!

The school? Why the school?

J: Because it got rats in here... It got mouses in here... it got... I would change... I would rather and I would be change. It got mouses in the auditorium... but I don't know why we going to the... and then... like if we... we having our grad-- in the auditorium right? So they gotta clean all that dirty clothes, messy clothes, pissy clothes, rats down there... they gotta clean like everything. Cause when we be in the auditorium, we saw a rat... and you know that little thing what the cheese be in? We saw one of them in the auditorium on the stage.

Ok! What about you Tasha?

T: Everything... because... not not everything... I'd get an animal treatment... clean the school.. cause like uh rodents and uhm... and like getting uh.. make it like a bigger schools... and not like a hood school... because some people think this a hood school.

Ok, what is a hood school?

T: A hood school.... A hood school is a school that doesn't teach you and just let you have fun. But in my class, they teach you, they teach and we have fun at the same time.

J: On Fridays, they be having fun Fridays.

T: Yea, we have fun Fridays in our class.

J: Today? Already?

T: we gon have funky Fridays.

J: We have a basketball game today!

T: I know this because Ms. George and Ms. Williams, they always talking... but Ms. Williams always looking crazy... she'll make a face... so this morning Ms. George and Ms. Williams talking... and we were all sitting in the front and it was so quiet... and they were whispering like "They should have funky Friday!".. so we heard them and I assume we are gonna have funky Friday... AND I seen cupcakes!! And a goodie bag... they had mini cupcakes and they had big cupcakes... so yea, we always have funky Friday because the teachers they uhm... we should be grateful because other classes don't get what we get.

J: Yes we do!

Ok, well what do you think Kevin.. what would you change about this neighborhood if you have one million dollars?

K: What I would change if I had a million dollars... I would change.... all these houses... all these homeless people... I'd change all them... Abandoned houses around here... I would change the kids life.. well if I can...

Ok, how would you change their lives?

K: By them going to school and staying in school, and doing they work what they want to do... like not doing drugs or nothing.

(To Tasha) You said people consider this a hood school? So what would the opposite be?

T: Opposite? Not much violence around it or more cleaner... with no rodents.. no like animals.

J: More cleaner! More cleaner! (As Tasha answers)

(To Kevin) This question would just be for Kevin. If someone paid you a million dollars to change the school, what would you change?

K: I'd change... the classes... like... I'd let the teachers decide which class they want... and like... if something already like... not done... like not clean... I'd change that.

J: I got a question too. I'd change the park. I'd ask the students. I'd put a waterpark... you know how six flag got a water park and stuff? I could like make a ride.... build it up.. I'd make a pool... then put a lot of water in it... and they can go on Fridays. Not everyday…

T: Only on Fridays!

J: One Fridays and Wednesdays or Thursdays... or everyday! Like, if I'm a teacher... like I'ma be a principal right... I'm trying to be the principal... and then I'm trying to make a pool.

Ok, so last question and then we're done! If someone gave your parents one million dollars, what do you think your parents would do with it?

T: My momma would pay her rent! She would pay all her bills and all her rent... and get her a new house, and get her a new car... well she already got a new car... but just do uhm.. important things.. that she can't..

J: My momma would do her stuff... work.. I mean not.. hold up.. my momma would uhm... she would do... buy groceries... get her a new house... do... pay her bills... and then she would spend all the money on me!

Ok! And what about you Kevin?

K: She'll probably spend money on children and my sister and she'll probably buy a mansion and have like nice cars...

T: I have to ask a question!

OK!

T: If you had one million dollars and you wanted to pay off your bills, uhm, is it possible that you can pay all your bills at one time.. with all the money? Let's say if it was today.. you post all the bills.. you pay all the bills for this month... but do you have the pay the bill every next month.

You can! Except for bills like your light bill which they bill you based on how much you use. Those bills you can't pay ahead of time. You have to pay that after they bill you and tell you how much you used. Alright, we've talked about a lot in terms of Race, our community, and our school. What, if anything else, would you want people to know about

you living in this community as a Black kid, going to school--at this "hood school" like

Tasha said some people say...

K: Shrugs

J: Nope *(begins asking about lunch)*